

STREET & SMITH'S

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DETECTIVE

STORY MAGAZINE

MAY 1942 15c



MURDER AT THE PLAYHOUSE

by THOMAS W. DUNCAN

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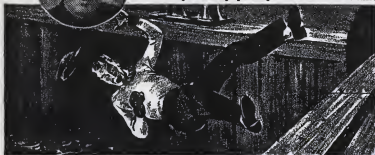
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STREET & SMITH'S
DETECTIVE
STORY MAGAZINE

EDITOR • DAISY BACON

CONTENTS MAY, 1942 • VOL. CLXIV NO. 1

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DETECTIVE STORY NOTES

In this issue of Detective Story Magazine you will read a short, but exceptional story in which flowers figure—Odgers T. Gurnee's "Evergreen." And flowers will also figure in a much longer story to be featured in the next issue—the June issue—of the magazine. Next month's featured story is called "The Orchid Corsage." It would be well not to miss it.

It is the work of Gordon Marling, a writer with considerable of a future, and one who already has mastered the art of spinning a yarn very deftly, indeed.

The orchid, a rare species, was worn by a wealthy and gifted young woman who was the most glamorous figure at a high-society dance. And a few hours later, this girl of brimming health, of grace and beauty and glamour and happiness, lay dead. Murdered.

Here is a subtle story, woven with a few bright scarlet threads brightening the dark, somber pattern of crime. If you start it, you will finish it—in one sitting. It's something to look forward to.

So remember: "The Orchid Corsage," by Gordon Marling, in the June issue of Detective Story Magazine.

Another featured story, excellent in its field, yet about as different from "The Orchid Corsage" as one story could be from another, is "Death Picks the Unknown Blonde,"

a short novel by Roger Torrey.

The victim in this murder case, too, as it happens, is a woman; a young girl who acted as a paid correspondent in a divorce case in which there was collusion on the part of the couple wishing to have their marital ties dissolved.

In reading this story, you'll wonder who could have killed this girl. Was it the lawyer in the divorce case; the lawyer who had a hard time convincing the police that he wasn't guilty? Was it the wife, who may not have wanted to be divorced, after all? Was it the young man whose jealousy was aroused by the fact that the girl he loved would tarnish her reputation for the sake of a fee?

We ask these questions. It would not be fair to answer them here.

This story will take you into upper-class New York society. You'll meet members of the set who dine at the Ritz, who go to El Morocco and the Stork Club, and "21" and the Rainbow Room. But you'll meet another layer of life, too—a landlady of a sordid rooming house, her nondescript roomers, folks who eat in cheap places, and perhaps not too regularly, at that. You'll meet New York in this story—high, low, middle-class. You'll meet a very hard-boiled detective. And, incidentally, a most unusual murderer.



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THE SCENT OF GARDENIA

by JOHN PAUL MITCHELL

*Professor Ambrose Hawley tries to
get away from women, but he runs
into a live one and a dead one.*

St. Alban College for Women closed its doors for the summer vacation of 1941 at twelve noon on the thirteenth of June, after graduation exercises replete with white organdy, ribbon-tied diplomas, and tearful farewells.

At twelve thirty, Professor Ambrose Hawley, one of the two male members of the faculty, climbed into his small coupé and headed for a spot remote from the presence of women.

In the luggage compartment of his car were fishing rods and tackle, plus a tent. His destination was vague, and he was aware that had he possessed a wife no doubt his haphazard

plans would have proved annoying to the lady.

But he had no wife.

Upon this comforting thought, Ambrose Hawley drew a deep sigh of satisfaction. After a year of struggling with feminine moods and caprice, with the ever-present scent of perfume and the all-too-familiar spectacle of innumerable becurled heads, he was frantic for an interlude in which the sight, smell, and sound of women would be lacking.

Probably he wouldn't shave for a month, he thought recklessly. He might even return to St. Alban College in the fall wearing a full-blown

beard in an attempt to free himself of admiring eyes watching him so incessantly that his dreams were haunted by them.

From this it may be correctly surmised Professor Hawley was young; also that he was handsome. His classes were popular; the professor himself was adored both in secret and too openly for comfort. All of which, in a college for women, put him on the defensive.

It was a relief to know that for three months his life was his own. No sentimental encounters. No crushes. Nobody bringing flowers to his classroom. Nobody touching his hand lingeringly, either by accident or design.

"Whoops!" said Ambrose Hawley inelegantly.

The road was a ribbon of white tape which the small gray coupé consumed steadily. He had lunched before leaving, lightly so as to depart with the utmost speed. By six o'clock he was ravenously hungry, and providentially he came upon one of the smaller tourist camps which are a godsend to travelers abhorring small-town commercial hotels.

The location was lovely. Six tiny white cabins hugged the face of a heavily wooded mountain slope. Some distance away stood a frame house having a glassed-in porch where meals were served. Adjacent to the cabins was a space cleared for cars. Already several cars were parked in this clearing.

Pulling into the parking space, Ambrose Hawley was reassured by the respectability of the other cars. All were of a make more expensive than his own, which argued Laurel Creek Cabins had merit as a stopping place. The view, looking down at a tumbling river far below, was extravagantly picturesque.

"I'll spend the night here," he de-

cided. "Likely I won't do better."

At the frame house a gray-haired man who was evidently the proprietor finished his conversation with an important-looking, well-dressed man in his forties and came to attend Ambrose Hawley.

"Dinner," requested Ambrose. "And I'd like to spend the night here."

"You're in luck," declared the proprietor. "Only one cabin left. Fish, steak, or chicken?"

Ambrose selected chicken.

"What cabin?" he inquired.

"No. 1," said the proprietor, producing a key attached to a round wooden disk. "That's the one nearest the road. Wait—I'll walk along with you and make sure everything's in order."

A small black-and-white dog followed at their heels as they went to the cabin and waited discreetly on the tiny porch when they went inside.

The cabin was immaculately clean, its furnishings simple but adequate: A double bed. A small dressing table. A bedside lamp. A tiny bathroom equipped with a shower. Even a radio.

Ambrose Hawley glanced around appreciatively, anticipating a pleasant evening spent with a mystery story from the assortment he had brought with him.

"This will do nicely," he said, after which his nostrils dilated with repugnance.

For a dazed moment he thought he was haunted by a ghost of all the perfume tainting his classroom. Then he realized the cabin was flooded with the scent of gardenia.

The proprietor smiled deprecatingly.

"The man you saw talking to me at the house had this cabin first, but his wife decided she wanted some-

thing more elaborate. Reckon she likes perfume, from the way it smells in here. But just leave the door open awhile and it'll air out in a jiffy." He glanced around, checking up. "Bed O. K. Towels O. K. Three dollars in advance, mister, and you'll certainly enjoy that shower in the morning. Our water here is crystal clear and crystal cold. If you like to fish, it might pay you to stay over a day. You'll find plenty fish in the river below."

"Sorry," said Ambrose Hawley. "But my plans are made." He drew out his billfold. "I'll pay for the cottage and dinner. I expect to leave before sunrise, breakfasting on the road."

"Then that'll be four dollars. Dinner in half an hour."

The proprietor returned to the house, followed by the black-and-white dog. Ambrose Hawley brought in the overnight bag he carried inside the car. He hesitated over his fishing gear and decided it would be safe to leave it in the luggage compartment. Carefully, he closed the windows of the car and locked both doors.

When he returned to the cabin with a book under his arm, he found the scent of gardenia had not evaporated, despite the open door.

"Must be expensive stuff," he thought. "But even so—"

It was a small problem, but it baffled him. Inch by inch, he went over the room until, inspecting the bed, he discovered a crumpled handkerchief thrust beneath the pillow.

The handkerchief was wet. He handled it gingerly.

Undoubtedly, the owner of the handkerchief had thrown herself upon the bed weeping. In changing cabins it had been overlooked.

In view of its condition, restoring the handkerchief would be em-

barrassing. After debating briefly, Ambrose walked to the door and threw it out, onto the path leading to the house. If it were found, its owner would think it had been dropped in moving.

Freed of his problem, he whistled while he washed up briskly. Later, walking up to the house for dinner, he spoke to the black-and-white dog and paused to listen to an altercation between the proprietor and a man who was protesting the lack of accommodations.

"Can I help it if all my cabins are rented?" inquired the proprietor reasonably. "Have dinner, then drive half a mile to the Blue Moon Camp. It isn't bad."

"Nor is it good!" grumbled the other man. "This is the only place in the whole State where I like to stop. I've driven over four hundred miles to get here."

Placatingly, the proprietor offered a room in the house, and the offer was accepted. Ambrose went inside where dinner waited, piping hot and excellent in quality. An elderly couple sat at the far end of the glassed-in porch; otherwise, he saw nothing of his fellow guests.

Dinner finished, he lighted a pipe and strolled back to the cabin, a handsome young man dressed in well-cut tweeds. The handkerchief was still on the path, but the scent of gardenia had vanished from the cabin. With a sigh of comfort, he piled the pillows on the bed and stretched out.

The mystery story proved absorbing. It was midnight when he turned out the light. He fell asleep instantly, but his sleep was fitful and disturbed. Once he roused to the feeling that a light had flickered over his face. Later, something jarred against the wall of the cabin and he speculated drowsily upon the



Ambrose realized that were another car to whisk along the road, he would be discovered standing there with a murdered woman.

presence of deer or bears or an unaltered cow. Later still, he heard sobbing close at hand, frantic and unchecked.

"She certainly goes in for tears," he thought, referring to the owner of the gardenia scent.

It was shortly before sunrise when he pulled out next morning. The path, the car, the trees, all were heavily coated with dew. He counted six cars, including his own, in the parking lot.

It was sharply cold, but the moun-

tain air was like wine. He had had little sleep. He was intensely hungry. But he felt fine.

Then, abruptly, his luck gave out.

There was a bump. He stopped the car hastily. Stepping out, he discovered a flat tire.

The tools of the car were in the luggage compartment. Ruefully, Ambrose Hawley pulled the keys from the dashboard and walked around the car.

The luggage compartment, which had been securely locked the night before, was unlocked. Apprehensive for his fishing tackle and other belongings, Ambrose seized the broken handle and raised the lid.

A rush of gardenia perfume escaped. Panic smote him. He stood holding the lid stupidly.

It wasn't true that a woman lay dead in his luggage compartment. It couldn't be true, yet there she was, a beautiful young woman clad in a pink silk night dress he recognized as being not only expensive but glamorous. A robe of thin white wool was wrapped around her. Her feet were bare.

Long, shining blond hair hung about her neck, but the eyes looking at him were dark. Suddenly, and with a cringing of nerves along his spine, Ambrose realized that were another car to whisk along the road, he might be discovered standing ineptly staring at a murdered woman.

Because undoubtedly this woman had been murdered, since nobody would pick the luggage compartment of a coupé as a place for natural death! It had been intended he would be miles away before the body was discovered. The accident to the tire had changed that.

Shakily, Ambrose closed the lid of the luggage compartment and leaned against the car debating what to do. There would be headlines in

the newspapers. Probably he himself would be accused of murder. Even if acquitted, he would be out of a job. The St. Alban College for Women would want no part of anyone connected even remotely with murder.

Anger claimed him at the injustice of his predicament.

This body must have been placed in his car at the tourist camp. After changing the tire, he would return there. But not with the body. No, indeed! If he could prevent it, his name would never be associated with that of a beautiful young woman entirely unknown to him.

His thoughts were skipping about crazily as he opened the compartment and reached for his tools. The buttons on one sleeve caught in a web of satiny hair. He had to control his nerves forcibly before freeing the sleeve as gently as possible, sweating lest another car appear before he succeeded.

With increasing alarm, his anger increased also.

Just why had his car been selected as a hiding place for the body?

Because it was parked conveniently? Because he had been overheard saying he would leave early? Because his was the only coupé on the parking lot and the luggage compartment larger? Was it because he carried his overnight bag inside the car and in all probability would not open the luggage compartment before leaving?

Whoever had placed the body in the car had taken the chance that he would not open the luggage compartment. Which argued that he had been watched as he unpacked on the previous night. But the murderer had not known he would recognize the scent of gardenia as belonging to the temporary occupant of Cabin No. 1.

Common sense informed him the scent of gardenia was scarcely a reliable source of identification, but doggedly he clung to the idea.

He would return to the camp. If the woman from Cabin No. 2 was missing—and he had no doubt she would be missing—he must contrive to delay the important-looking man he had seen conversing with the proprietor on the previous night until the police could be summoned on some pretext.

Beginning to work on the tire, and making a poor job of it because his fingers were all thumbs, he tried to figure a way of delaying everybody at the camp, and suddenly grinned.

A flat tire had delayed him. O. K.—that would do for the rest of them! He would flatten two tires on every car, making it necessary for at least one tire on each car to be vulcanized before departure, and also providing a reason for complaint to the police against vandalism.

But how would he manage this?

Puncturing ten tires would take time and would expose him to the likelihood of being caught—unless it could be managed quickly! With relief, he remembered the rifle equipped with a Maxim silencer reposing in the luggage compartment. That would do the trick, and he blessed the impulse which had led him to bring the rifle on this trip instead of leaving it in his rooms at the college.

"Hurry, stupid," he admonished himself. "Got to get back there before anybody gets away."

The popping of a motorcycle became manifest. A State trooper rode in sight. Slowing up, he stopped beside Ambrose Hawley's disabled car.

The trooper was red-haired and friendly.

"Having trouble?" he inquired.

"Not much trouble," denied Ambrose.

A sudden thought turned him weak.

In the excitement of freeing his sleeve from the dead woman's clinging, satiny hair he had forgotten to remove the spare tire from the luggage compartment. If the trooper lingered, he would think it strange he did not proceed with the changing of the tire.

Guilefully, Ambrose stood up and began to converse.

"You must know this part of the country pretty well," he said. "Where's a good place to breakfast?"

The trooper laughed.

"You're half a mile past the best place in the State—Laurel Creek Cabins. Better drive back. Time you get that tire changed, they'll be open for breakfast. Want me to lend a hand?"

"Thanks, no," refused Ambrose Hawley, sweating. "Small car, light tire, easy job. This won't take long!"

"O. K., fella," said the trooper, kicking his engine alive. "Just thought I'd offer help to a motorist in distress. Politeness is part of a trooper's job in this State. S'long!"

The motorcycle roared down the road.

For a second time, Ambrose Hawley leaned weakly against the car. Then he hurried to get the spare tire, forcing himself to reach across the dead young woman again, avoiding the spiderlike hair which sought to trap him.

Carefully, he removed the tire and replaced it with the flat. As he lowered the lid to the luggage compartment, a truck drove in sight. Its driver waved a carelessly sympathetic hand as he passed. "Tough luck, buddy!" he called.

It was getting late. The sun

was coming up. He must hurry to dispose of the body before the road filled with traffic. Quickly, he completed changing the tire and stood up.

The road was straight. He could see a long way in either direction. No car was in sight. If he worked fast, he could be on his way in a moment or so.

His hands trembled as he lifted the dead girl from the luggage compartment. A clump of bushes grew close to the road. He placed the body there, shuddering as her head drooped against his shoulder and her hair brushed his cheek.

The ground was damp. "He knew a throb of pity as he placed the thinly clad form upon it. "Honey, I wouldn't do this unless I had to," he murmured apologetically. "But they'll find you soon."

Carefully, he wrapped the white robe around the bare, exposed feet. As he was turning away, he leaned down again looking closely at the roots of the shining blond hair.

"You were beautiful enough," he thought. "Why did you bleach your hair?"

For a moment or so longer, the dead girl's beauty held him, then he turned away. Smiling grimly, Ambrose Hawley took the rifle from the luggage compartment and put it on the seat beside him.

Presently, he eased back into the identical spot his car had occupied during the night. Counting the other cars, he found none had left during his absence and set to work. His task finished almost soundlessly in the space of a few seconds, he returned to Cabin No. 1.

If anyone had witnessed his departure, he would simply say he had changed his mind and returned for a day's fishing. After breakfast, he could manage by some pretext to as-

certain whether or not the lady addicted to gardenia perfume was missing. And he knew the answer to that already!

In the tiny bathroom belonging to Cabin No. 1, he washed his hands thoroughly and then walked to the house.

Smoke poured from its chimneys. On the glassed-in porch, logs were blazing in the fireplace. Ambrose stood before the fire, thawing the chill, physical and spiritual, from his bones. Presently the proprietor joined him.

"Changed your mind, eh?"

"Changed my mind," confirmed Ambrose Hawley. "Think I'll try for a few of those fish you mentioned."

"That's fine. Breakfast will be fifty cents, and we can pack you a lunch. Staying over tonight?"

"That depends upon the fish," Ambrose Hawley said cautiously. He risked a question. "The people who had my cabin before me—are they staying over?"

"Leaving right after breakfast," informed the proprietor. "The lady was sick last night and we served dinner in their cabin. But he was up a few minutes ago and said they'd eat here at six thirty. Pretty close to that now." He grinned at Ambrose Hawley. "Nothing like perfume for stimulating curiosity about a woman, is there? Stuff like that makes you think she'll turn out to be something like a movie star, whereas she's probably middle-aged and fat!"

Ambrose turned scarlet.

He was about to protest his lack of interest in women of any age when suddenly he heard the popping of a motorcycle. Glancing down at the road, he recognized the State trooper who had offered assistance in the changing of his tire.

The trooper turned into the park-

ing lot. Dismounted and paused to examine the cars, then came toward the house. A moment later he entered the glassed-in porch. His face was no longer friendly.

"Got a phone here?" he inquired brusquely. "If so, I'll use it to report a murder."

"A murder!" repeated the proprietor. "Happen anywhere near here?"

"If my guess counts for anything, it happened at Laurel Creek Cabins," said the trooper.

"Don't say things like that, officer. It would ruin my business!"

"This murder sure ruined this woman," informed the trooper. "And she's a looker, even with the back of her head knocked in. A blonde, and plenty glamorous. Now, where's the phone?"

The proprietor jerked his head. "Back there."

"Nobody leaves before the authorities arrive," informed the trooper. "Though from the look of those cars in the parking lot, nobody'll be leaving for a while, anyhow."

"What's the matter with the cars?"

"Two flat tires on every car except a small gray coupé." The trooper turned a long, hard stare upon Ambrose Hawley. "Shoulda wrecked your own tires after you got back, buddy—or no, that wouldn't do any good. I'd already seen you down the road. The body was found behind some bushes right beside where you changed that tire."

"How do you know that?"

The trooper extended his hand. Upon its palm lay a bolt.

"You overlooked this in your hurry. It matches the bolts on your wheel. After breakfast, I'll sniff around the luggage compartment. My guess is it'll smell like gardenia."

Probably it would, thought Ambrose. And if so, probably the scent of gardenia would hang him!

"Look," he said. "I'll tell you everything I know about this. The proprietor will confirm my story."

"Save it until I telephone," countered the trooper.

He vanished inside. The proprietor stared at Ambrose.

"Gardenia," he repeated. "So that's why you were asking about the folks in Cabin 2?"

"Have you seen her this morning?"

"I haven't seen her—" began the proprietor.

"Then she's missing," said Ambrose eagerly. "I discovered the body in my car when I stopped up the road to change a tire—"

He paused, because the proprietor was regarding him with obvious disbelief.

"I said I hadn't seen the lady in Cabin 2. That's true, but I heard her voice when I put some wood for the fireplace on their porch awhile back. Young man, if you had a fight with your girl friend and killed her, I wish you'd picked another camp to stop at!"

The trooper returned in time to hear the last few words.

"What gives you the idea he killed his girl friend?" he asked keenly.

"He's putting out some crazy story about the man in Cabin 2, killing his wife and sticking her in the back of his car during the night. And it ain't so. I heard that woman talking to her husband less than half an hour ago—"

He looked at Ambrose Hawley accusingly. "I thought you acted funny about that gardenia scent last night. But if your victim used it, I can understand why."

Ambrose Hawley remembered something. Quietly, he turned to the trooper.

"The proprietor will tell you I ar-

rived alone last night in time for dinner."

"Saying nothing about a dead body in your car," remarked the proprietor bitterly.

"I had dinner and turned in. This morning I left early, after announcing my intention last night. A short distance up the road I had a flat tire and discovered the body. Just after my discovery, you arrived upon the scene—"

"I thought you acted a mite unfriendly," said the trooper.

"Well, how would you feel?" defended Ambrose. "I'm a professor at a women's college. Any scandal, and my job is washed up. Naturally, I wasn't going to have that body on my hands any longer than necessary, but I put it where it would be discovered quickly. Then I returned here and knocked all the cars out of commission so everybody would be on hand pending the arrival of the authorities. I thought I could clear up the murder immediately. You see, it hadn't been intended discovery of the body would be made before tonight—"

"Yeah," nodded the trooper. "Always provided your story's straight. But from the way you've acted, I don't believe it."

"Listen," said Ambrose Hawley desperately. "I had lunch at the college yesterday. I drove straight here. That body could only have been put in the car at this camp—"

He related the events of the previous evening, touching upon the incident of the gardenia perfume.

"He's telling the truth about that and him making a fuss about it," interrupted the proprietor. "But the rest is phony. The woman in Cabin 2 ain't missing. Here she comes now!"

A couple appeared in the distance—the man Ambrose had seen on the previous evening, accompanied by a

blond, faded, petulant-looking woman.

Bowing to the proprietor as they entered the glassed-in porch, the two ignored Ambrose Hawley and the trooper and walked to a table set beside the fire.

"Our breakfast, please," said the man pleasantly. "We are anxious to get away as soon as possible." He smiled at his companion. "My dear, I miss the morning paper!"

The proprietor opened his mouth. The trooper restrained him with a quick gesture.

"I'm afraid your departure must be delayed, sir," he informed. "A vandal flattened two tires on every car in the parking lot except this gentleman's."

Did he imagine a sudden stillness in the pair seated beside the fire?—wondered Ambrose. And was the trooper giving him a break?

"Going far?" inquired the man beside the fire, of Ambrose. "I suppose you, at least, can get away immediately."

"New Hampshire," murmured Ambrose.

"Let's all have breakfast," suggested the trooper. "With nothing said of any unpleasantness until after breakfast." His glance at the proprietor was a warning. "We three can share a table."

"Why not everybody breakfast together?" inquired the man beside the fire hospitably. "This table can easily be made larger."

The trooper accepted. Very soon the group was drinking orange juice companionably with other breakfasters beginning to straggle in, complaining loudly about the tires.

The trooper calmed them.

"It won't take long to have them fixed. After breakfast we'll send the damaged tires into a town ten miles away to be vulcanized."

Ambrose Hawley sat next to the woman from Cabin 2. Her name was Warren. Her husband was an attorney. They were pleasant, well-to-do people from Pittsburg, starting on a vacation trip.

Warren talked freely. Mrs. Warren was silent. Her eyelids were red, and Ambrose recalled the stormy weeping heard in the night. Vaguely, he thought the woman beside him certainly wasn't the type to use exotic scent. Then suddenly he perceived that this woman used no perfume.

He rose to his feet, coughing explosively, and headed for the door of the porch. The trooper followed.

"What's the idea?"

"Come to my cabin," murmured Ambrose between coughs.

When the door of the cabin closed behind them, he talked fast.

"Look," said Ambrose. "The proprietor told you I arrived alone. I couldn't have brought the body with me because rigor mortis hadn't set in when I found it. That woman hadn't been dead ten hours!"

"I thought of that," said the trooper. "It's why I kept the story of the murder quiet until the authorities arrive."

"It would be nice if you had the crime solved by then."

"Sure," said the trooper. "Be nice if tomorrow was Christmas and you were Santa Claus!"

"Suppose we make a deal," suggested Ambrose. "You get credit for solving the murder and I get to go on my way without being implicated. My job depends on that."

The trooper thought hard.

"O. K.," he said. "I can swing it, if you can swing your part."

"Let's examine the baggage in Cabin 2," said Ambrose Hawley. "If we move fast enough, I think we can

manage it without being interrupted. Mr. and Mrs. Warren are still breakfasting."

"The lady doesn't have much appetite," said the trooper.

"Nor does she smell of gardenia," said Ambrose Hawley.

For a moment they stared at each other.

"Let's get busy with that baggage," suggested the trooper.

In Cabin 2 the bags were ready for departure. Mr. Warren's were open, but Mrs. Warren's two pieces in smart red alligator leather were locked.

Ambrose Hawley glanced around the cabin while the trooper struggled with the locks.

This was a larger cabin than the one he had occupied. Two rooms instead of one—a small sitting room as well as a bedroom, both rooms flooded with the familiar scent.

"See what I mean?" said Ambrose Hawley, sniffing.

Wrestling with the locked bags, the trooper said he saw.

Ambrose leaned down to inspect a poker lying on the hearth of the fireplace in the sitting room.

"Warren's a lawyer," he said. "There'll be no fingerprints. But I point out the handle of this poker is an admirable weapon for cracking skulls—and Cabin 1 has neither hearth nor poker."

A lock cracked. Then another.

"The dame owning these bags is certainly nuts about perfume," said the trooper. "Funny, with the whole cabin giving it out, that woman eating breakfast doesn't smell of it."

Walking over to the baggage, Ambrose lifted a gold-backed comb and brush from the small fitted bag and combed the brush diligently with the comb.

"What you looking for?" inquired



*By means of the silenced rifle,
Ambrose flattened two tires on
each of the cars.*

the trooper, grinning. "Something uncomplimentary to the lady? Hey, the owner of these bags certainly did right by herself. Somehow, these things don't seem to match—"

What he meant was that the
DS—2E

articles in the two bags represented the last word in luxury, and would belong more naturally to a petted, spoiled young woman than to the woman at breakfast on the glassed-in porch.

Ambrose Hawley carried the comb to the window and examined it closely.

"The way I see it," he explained. "Warren arrived here with a young woman. Later his wife arrived. Maybe she'd been trailing them all day, or maybe she knew they were to stop here last night. Anyhow, she came. Whether she killed the girl or he killed her, I don't know. But the girl died. They put her body in my car and Mrs. Warren took her place in Cabin 2—"

"The proprietor would know about that," demurred the trooper.

"I think you will find the proprietor didn't see Mrs. Warren until this morning," said Ambrose. "Their dinner was served in the cabin."

The trooper stared at him with a dawning of respect in his china-blue eyes and scratched his chin thoughtfully.

"You getting all that from the comb?" he inquired.

"From the comb," confirmed Ambrose. "Mrs. Warren is a natural, though faded, blonde. The girl was a dyed blonde. Her hair was originally dark-brown. She dyed it for this trip, perhaps because Warren's wife is a blonde. This brush still holds brown hair."

He glanced out the window.

"Here come the Warrens. I suggest arresting him for murder. That may break one or the other down."

He closed the bags. From the bathroom he brought a towel and wrapped both brush and comb in it, while the trooper watched admiringly.

"For a professor, you're smart," he conceded. "I don't know what you teach at that college for women, but you oughta be teaching crime detection to dumb cops!"

"I'd like that," said Ambrose Hawley wistfully.

Footsteps sounded outside. The Warrens entered.

"What's the meaning of this?" demanded Warren indignantly as he looked at the broken locks on the two red bags.

"It means I gotta hold you two for murder," the trooper informed him. "One of you did the job. The other was an accessory either before or after the fact."

Mrs. Warren began to weep.

"It's no use, Richard," she sobbed.

"I told you it wouldn't work."

Warren looked at Ambrose Hawley bitterly.

"It would have worked, my dear, except for the millionth chance which gave this young man a flat tire."

"Maybe that millionth chance represented justice," suggested Ambrose Hawley.

"Perhaps," conceded Warren.

"I did it," said Mrs. Warren. "I knew they were to stop at this camp last night. So I drove within half a mile of here and walked the rest of the way, arriving around midnight. I used a flashlight and located them in the second cabin. The door was unlocked. He was asleep on a couch beside the fire, but the air was full of that scent she used and I knew she was with him. When I entered the bedroom she said, 'Is that you, darling?' and I went crazy and hit her with the poker."

"Then Mr. Warren put the body in my car," said Ambrose.

It was a statement, rather than a question.

"Yes. He wanted to save me if he could. He felt it was all his fault—"

She paused, her eyes tormented. "Could I help getting old? Why is youth so important?"

"Caroline, my dear," pleaded Warren.

Mrs. Warren quieted.

"Sorry," she said. "Well, officer, that's the story."

The trooper glanced from one to the other of the Warrens, considering.

"Look," he said. "You've given this young man a nasty experience. How about leaving him out of the rest of the picture? You could just as well have dumped the body down the road where it was found, Warren. Seems to me you owe Mr. Hawley something. Why not let the story stand that way?"

"Very well," agreed Warren listlessly. "What does it matter?"

"Plenty to the professor," assured the trooper. He turned to Ambrose Hawley, taking the towel-wrapped brush and comb from him. "O. K., pal, better be on your way. Even if these two try to welsh on their confession, thanks to you I have sufficient evidence to convict them."

"Thanks!" said Ambrose.

"Thank you!" said the trooper.

Ambrose hurried to his car and backed it into the road, ignoring the shouts of the proprietor.

The sky was blue, the road entrancing, but his mood wasn't the same as on the previous day. When he passed the spot where he had deposited the body, he saluted, remembering a lovely face framed in waves of satiny yellow hair.

"Honey, I squared your account," he murmured, and then felt abashed because the Warrens had seemed so weighted with misery when he left.

Warren had been trying to comfort his wife, trying to explain what had happened.

"Caroline, my feeling for Mona was something I could neither fight nor resist," Warren had said. "She wanted me to leave you and marry her, but I wouldn't do that. When a

man's wife has been loving and loyal over a period of years, if he's anything better than a heel he doesn't want to walk out on her. This sort of thing was the best we could manage, and neither of us was happy. Mona cried a lot. Now she is dead!"

Mona had cried a lot and now she was dead—

Ambrose thought he could understand why Warren had departed from his safe, comfortable life to enter into an intrigue which had ended in murder.

Sometimes if life was too safe and comfortable it bordered on dullness and that drove a man to folly. Look how exhilarated, how keenly alive, he himself had felt during the brief interim in which he had played the game of hound and hunted, pitting his wits against the trap in which fate had enmeshed him. Certainly nothing in his life at St. Alban College for Women had ever handed him such a thrill!

Remembering the thrill had been based on the misfortunes of two unhappy people, he stopped the car beside a river. Took everything from the luggage compartment and scrubbed it thoroughly.

Perhaps when the scent of gardenia had vanished he would be able to resume the carefree mood in which he had begun his vacation.

Ambrose Hawley hoped so, though he doubted it, knowing he had discovered the thrill of solving a mystery was greater than reading one. He would have to use will power to keep from yearning for another mystery to solve.

Fervently, he hoped he would never encounter the scent of gardenia again, because that would bring it all back—the unhappiness of the Warrens, the beauty of the dead girl, and the thrill of the chase.

THE END.

MURDER AT THE PLAYHOUSE

A Short Novel

by THOMAS W. DUNCAN



*What can you do about a holdup when you're
a real detective, but playing a stage sleuth
with only blank cartridges in your gun?*



Oh, pity the poor Hindu—
He does the best he kin do!
Old Jingle.

I.

Never in his thirty-five years upon this wicked earth had Detective Cliff Shepherd been as frightened as he was at this moment.

And never had he been as boiling mad for so long as he had been in those past six weeks.

He stood in the back-stage shadows, peering through a crack in the door leading to the library of J. Montmarcy DeWitt, the murdered millionaire. At least, the program

of the Tamarack Little Theater maintained that the room—bounded on three sides by canvas walls and on the fourth by footlights—was Mr. DeWitt's library.

Someone whispered, "Are you scared, Cliff?"

She was a blond young woman in a pink smock. Helen Napier, wife of Edward Napier, the Little Theater director. Her hair was charmingly mussed tonight and a smudge of dirt streaked her peaches-and-cream cheek.

Cliff Shepherd, who for fourteen years had been a valued and hard-to-frighten member of the Tamarack police department, held out his hand. It trembled violently. His knees were quivering, also, and his throat felt dry and cracked.

Mrs. Napier smiled. "Take it easy. Stage fright gets them all, the first time. It'll leave you, once you get on-stage."

Shepherd sighed, and his look of misery increased.

"I'm no actor," he whispered. "Just because I make my living as a dick is no reason I should be any good as a dick on the stage."

Mrs. Napier's smile brightened. "Why, you're grand, Cliff. A grand actor! And you look the part."

Inwardly, Shepherd gave a long, agonized groan. Look the part! Great guns!

He was wearing a black derby hat and thick-soled black shoes. That was how the Tamarack Little Theater—whose membership read like a roll call of the city's richest people—believed a detective invariably dressed. Upon his vest gleamed a shiny shield. His tie was loud. And in his armpit holster, his .38 was loaded—with blanks!

His costume was indignity enough, but worst of all was what they had done to his face. The make-up com-

mittee had first smeared his high cheekbones and lean, hard jaw with cold cream. Yes, cold cream! Then they had rubbed into his skin a putty-colored substance which they called ground-tone. Downstairs in that dressing room he had felt as miserable as a shampooed dog. But more was coming!

They rouged his cheeks. Actually! And his lips. And then, using a black substance on the point of a toothpick, they etched in black lines around his keen blue eyes. And to top it all off, they employed a big powder puff to slap powder upon his face.

"Aren't you going to paint my fingernails?" he had demanded sarcastically.

They took him seriously, the mugs! They said, oh, no, that wouldn't do. Not in keeping with his role as hard-bitten Detective O'Callahan.

Now Mrs. Napier—who was really a good egg—patted his arm and told him to keep his chin up. Then she tiptoed away on some back-stage errand.

Cliff Shepherd sighed and stood waiting for his cue. This was the opening night of the comedy-mystery, "Murder Is So Jolly," which two years ago had delighted Broadway and which now, for five nights, was supposed to delight Tamarack's upper crust. Five nights. An eternity!

That he had become an amateur Thespian was no fault of Cliff Shepherd. Decidedly not! Nor could the blame be laid at the door of Detective Inspector Marcus Halpin. Nor Police Chief Tim McConkey.

They had been as disgusted as he. When Police Commissioner John Kimball sent word from the city hall that the detective bureau

must furnish the Little Theater with one live detective, they had snorted and fumed. Trouble was, the commissioner had social as well as political ambitions, and when those debts from the Little Theater told him they had decided it would be just dandy to have an actual detective give authenticity to a hole in their March play, he smiled and agreed.

So to headquarters had voyaged the casting committee, headed by Edward Napier, the salaried director. He seemed a nice young fellow. Rather apologetic about busting into the department routine. It wasn't his fault if the casting committee had brain storms.

After much conferring, the committee picked Cliff Shepherd, head of the homicide bureau, for the detective role.

Shepherd bucked like a bronc.

"I know, I know," growled Inspector Halpin, masticating his cigar. "You ain't happy about it. I ain't exactly yellin' 'Hooray' myself. But it's the commissioner's orders and—"

So, hopping mad beneath his surface iciness, Cliff Shepherd took the role. He knew he was heading into trouble, but he didn't realize how extensive and dangerous that trouble would be.

The Tamarack Little Theater stood on a side street in the residential district, and on this misty March night two rows of expensive cars lined both sides of the street.

At about the time Cliff Shepherd was going on, a big sedan turned into the street and came cruising with headlights peering through the mist like yellow eyes.

Curb standards in front of the theater warned, "No Parking, By Order of Police Dept."

The sedan curved into the open

space and halted with its motor humming. The driver, upon whose lap reposed a revolver, stayed at the wheel. His hat brim was pulled down.

Inside the car not a word was uttered. As soon as it stopped, the front and back doors nearest the curb snapped open, and three men alighted. Two of them prowled briskly around the building toward a door marked, "Stage Entrance."

The third man—a big-framed fellow wearing a belted trench coat—paused and glanced up at a sidewalk sign hanging from a wrought-iron beam. It said: "Ye Olde Playhouse." Beneath it a supplementary sign announced: "Murder Is So Jolly. Tonight."

A faint smile quirked one corner of the man's hard mouth, and then he turned and glanced up and down the street. On the sidewalks gleaming beneath the bare, dripping trees he saw not a pedestrian.

He moved toward the theater entrance. He had skin nearly as dark as bronze, and like his close-clipped hair his eyes were black. He handled his body well, walking with the silent, lithe movements of an Indian.

The theater stood back a few paces from the street, and before reaching the entrance the man paused and glanced over his shoulder. Not apprehensively; just to be thorough. His left hand went into the trench coat and brought out something round and dark which he flipped toward his mouth. It was a piece of chocolate candy, and he caught it like a trained dog catching a scrap of tossed meat. Then his right hand slid into his trench coat and remained there.

Moving with that smoothness of an Indian or a silky-muscled cat animal, the man opened the theater door

and stepped inside. On his left he saw the lighted ticket window, where a woman with iron-gray hair was checking figures.

A couple of steps carried him across the narrow foyer to the auditorium door. In accordance with its noncommercial nature and the exclusiveness of its patronage, the auditorium was not large. The heads of perhaps two hundred evening-gowned and dinner-jacketed people were silhouetted against the light from the stage.

Nothing untoward was occurring on the stage—yet. Four people stood there reading their lines. A butler. A man in dark make-up who wore a Hindu turban and sat at a table gazing into a crystal globe. A lean-jawed man with a derby shoved back on his sandy head. And a woman.

The woman was large. Monumental! She was sixty, perhaps, and in her low-cut, tight fitting silver gown she looked every inch a dowager. Which was exactly what she was—in life as well as in the play.

In life her name was Mrs. H. Fellows Dwight, and she was a patroness of all the arts, but especially the art of the theater. When the building committee had needed money to construct this theater, she had dashed off a check for ten thousand dollars—just like that. People said, behind her broad back, that she was stinking rich.

She it was who had urged the play-reading committee to select "Murder Is So Jolly," probably because the play contained a good role which she fancied herself acting with verve and distinction. She was acting it now, with more verve, perhaps, than distinction.

Mrs. Dwight had a fondness for jewelry and a purse which could

gratify it, and tonight she looked like a white elephant that had raised a gem shop. On second row, a reporter from the *Times-Bulletin* was wondering if he could get by with writing, "Mrs. Dwight gave a dazzling performance."

For dazzling she certainly was. In her hair she wore a sparkling diadem and on her wrist a diamond bracelet. When she moved her hands, her ringed fingers scintillated white fire. It was as if Mrs. Dwight, who had been born plain Hannah Krisbaugh down in Shantytown, was hopeful that those costly stones could banish from her hands the memory of the sudsy washtubs into which they used to dip—before H. Fellows Dwight struck it rich.

To the saliva glands of the bronzed-skinned man, sight of those gems offered such stimulus as pork chops and watermelon to a Harlem picnic. "Crickety cripes!" he thought.

But he knew that the necklace encircling Mrs. Dwight's ample throat was more valuable even than the sparklers.

So that Mrs. Dwight might wear that necklace, a number of oysters had labored for years in the warm waters of the South Pacific. Diving boys had been sharked in two, and sharks of the two-legged variety had fought and bargained and plotted in order to assemble those pearls. Virtually each pearl had a violent history. Because of them, a man had been knifed in Shanghai, and another garroted in Paris.

Finally, a famous dealer had matched them and strung them; they were the crowning achievement of his career. From the platinum clasp set with emeralds to the center pearl itself, it was a beautiful necklace. The gems had a warm flesh tint, like the faintly flushed cheeks of a young girl.

A year ago, for a wedding-anniversary present, Mr. Dwight had purchased the necklace in New York. His check ran to six figures.

The Tamarack papers had published feature stories about the necklace, with photographs of Mrs. Dwight. She loved that. When some of her feminine friends had kindly advised her to have an imitation necklace made up, and to keep the original locked in a vault, Mrs. Dwight said, "Well, I guess not! What good are jewels if you can't wear them?"

"But, my dear, they might be stolen—"

"Over my dead body!"

And to Mr. Dwight she had confided: "Those old cats are jealous—that's all. They turn green every time I wear this necklace." She grinned. "So I'm going to wear it a lot."

Not a hundred wild horses could have prevented Mrs. Dwight from wearing her pearls and her diamonds on the stage tonight. She knew she was ruining the evening for every woman in the audience.

She wasn't ruining the evening for the bronze-skinned man. She was making it, for him.

A moment after he paused in the auditorium doorway, a young man in dinner clothes smiled and said:

"Ticket, please."

"I'm not here for the show. I've got something to say to you. Something important."

The ticket taker waited.

"Not here," said the bronze-skinned man. "Let's go in the office."

Looking puzzled, the ticket taker hesitated a second, then said:

"All right. This way."

A door led from the auditorium into the box office. As they entered, the gray-haired woman glanced up.

The man in the trench coat closed the door softly and stood with his shoulders against it. His right hand came from his pocket, clutching a blue-steel automatic. In a low, confidential voice he said:

"You folks are going to be sensible. I hope."

The woman and the young man glanced at each other. Their faces looked suddenly drained.

"Do what I say and you won't get hurt."

The woman looked as if she might scream.

"Lady," the man with the pistol said, "it won't do no good to yell. Just you lay down on the floor. Face down."

"Better do it, Myrtle," the young man said.

Myrtle's lips moved soundlessly, and she swallowed, but she obeyed.

"That's what I call sensible," the man in the trench coat said. "I always say it pays to deal with classy people. They got etiquette."

His left hand dived into his pocket and brought out a knife.

"Here, pal," he told the young man. "Open it."

The young man, whose face was flour-colored, took the knife and thumbed open the big blade.

The intruder said, "What I want you to do is cut that phone wire. Down near the bell box. You cut it and then lay down on the floor and you won't get hurt."

The young man obeyed. It was very nearly the first time in his life he had followed anybody's orders. He was a Cressingham. One of the Cressinghams. "Scion of an eminent Tamarack family," the papers would say.

Watching him saw at the wire, the bronze-skinned man smiled. And his left hand brought from his pocket a chocolate drop. A trickle

of the vanilla filling had leaked out and hardened, and something stuck to it. It was a tiny cup-shaped paper, brown and serrated; every piece of candy in the box from which that chocolate had come was nestled in such a paper.

With his left forefinger, the man flipped the paper cup from the candy; it fluttered to the floor. Then he tossed the chocolate drop into the air and caught it in his mouth. Neat! He had practiced that trick a lot, and he was proud of his dexterity.

II.

This was Edward Napier's first year as director of the Tamarack Little Theater, and he was eager to make good. Last summer, on the strength of the job, he had married Helen; and if he came through with a successful season he hoped for a new contract with a salary rise.

Coming to Tamarack fresh from college, everything had looked rosy, and he launched zestfully into his work. To an outsider, he supposed his job looked easy, but he knew better. How he knew better! Always he maintained a smiling, diplomatic front, but when he and Helen were alone he would explode:

"Of all the spoiled brats of all ages! Of all the temperamental screwballs!"

"I know, darling, they're pretty awful," Helen would murmur. "But keep your chin up."

With this play, everything had gone awry. The play itself was terrible, a worthless piece of cleverness. He had hoped to produce Shakespeare this spring. But old Lady Dwight had come horning in, demanding that they present "Murder Is So Jolly," and hinting for the dowager's role. She got what she wanted. She would never let the

Little Theater forget that ten-thousand-dollar check.

Then the casting committee got the bright idea of using a real detective in the O'Callahan role. There was no arguing them out of it. A typically amateur brain storm, that!

From the first, Edward Napier had sensed that Cliff Shepherd was utterly disgusted with the whole affair, and he didn't blame him.

"I like that fellow Shepherd," Napier told his wife. "I like that cold, lean blondness of his, and those piercing blue eyes."

"He's not blond, darling, he's sandy-haired. There's even a little red in it. He told me he's half Scotch and half Irish."

"Whatever he is, I like him. He keeps his mouth shut, and he does what you tell him to without arguing."

"I'll bet he'd be a bloodhound on a case," Helen said. "I'll bet nothing could stop him."

Tonight, Edward Napier sat upon the stage gazing into a crystal ball. He was wearing a Hindu costume and a turban swathed his head. On the program Napier was not credited with enacting the role of Prince Rawal, the seer; that part was supposed to be depicted by Lester Winterset III.

Supposed to be was right! The fact that Napier had been compelled to step into the role at the last minute illustrated what a maddening business it was, directing a group of amateurs. They were absolutely undependable.

At six o'clock this evening, Lester Winterset III had telephoned Napier that it would be impossible for him to appear in the play tonight.

"Lester! You can't let us down!" Napier exclaimed.

"Who says I can't? I'm sick. Very sick man."

Winterset's tongue sounded thick, and Napier suspected he was drunk.

"What's wrong with you?"

"Sick. Sick of you, sick of the play, sick of this town, sick of myself, sick of the world."

"Now listen, Lester. That's an important part. We can't get along without you."

"Whoopee!" Lester said.

"Why don't you lay off the liquor and take a cold shower and come over to the playhouse?"

"Whoopee!"

"Lester! This is opening night. You can't do this to us!"

"Nuts to you. Nuts to everybody."

Buzzing sounded from the receiver; Lester Winterset had hung up.

Within ten seconds, Napier made a decision: he would play that part himself. After grinding through rehearsals he knew virtually every line in the play, and if he got stuck he could ad lib. He and Winterset were about the same build, so the costume should fit all right, and once he put on the black mustache and dark make-up which the part required, and spoke in the heavily-accented voice, few in the audience would realize that the man in the turban was now Winterset.

Now, gazing into the crystal, Napier told himself that the play was moving along better than he had expected. At this moment Mrs. Dwight and Shepherd were snapping through some lively dialogue, and the lines seemed to be getting over. Their acting was miles below professional caliber, but the audience was sympathetic. Gosh, though, why did Mrs. Dwight want to bedeck herself in all those gems?

And then suddenly Napier's heart

jumped, for something occurred that had not been written into the play.

The right-stage door bounded open, and two men strode onto the set. They carried guns.

One was a fellow in his twenties. He was of slight build, and he wore no overcoat, but a heavy gray sweater sheathed his torso beneath his suit coat. His chin and forehead were negligible, but his nose made up for this lack. It was a great curved slab of nose, leaping out from between blond eyebrows. Hooked upon it was a pair of amber-rimmed spectacles with pupil-distorting lenses.

His companion was thirty, perhaps; a lean, high-pocketed chap with a thin, pallid face. A brown topcoat flapped about his narrow legs and a brown hat rode his head at a careless angle. His oblique mouth was a thin sneer.

"Get 'em up," that mouth ordered, quietly.

There was a moment of startled inaction.

"I said to get 'em up," High-pockets snapped.

Napier glanced at Cliff Shepherd. Never before had the director been a guest at a holdup party, and he was uncertain about the amenities of such an occasion. He would follow Shepherd's lead.

A change had come over Shepherd. His countenance was colder, harder, and the pupils of his eyes contracted to dark-blue pin dots.

But he put up his hands. For a moment that surprised Napier. Because Shepherd was a detective he had unconsciously expected him to resist, to do something heroic and noble. Then he realized that Shepherd was doing exactly the sensible thing. For the revolver he wore was loaded with blanks. Instead of offering futile resistance, during which

some member of the cast or audience might get shot, Shepherd was submitting. But those sharp eyes were snapping accurate pictures of the intruders.

So Napier followed suit and put up his hands, and he saw that Harold Kenworthy, the stage butler, was being sensible also.

Mrs. H. Fellows Dwight looked more annoyed than sensible. Obviously, this was one of those things that didn't happen; not in polite society; not among the people one knew. She lifted her brows and demanded:

"What do you young men want?"

"Take it easy, girlie," High-pockets said.

He flipped a handkerchief from his pocket and spread it on the table before which Napier was sitting.

"Put your rocks there," he said.

Comprehension crossed Mrs. Dwight's face, but instead of obeying, or lifting her hands, she planted her feet apart and placed her fists on her hips. She looked as stalwart as a washwoman.

"Try to make me," she said.

High-pockets stared at her for a second, then shifted his rapid glance to his companion.

"O. K., Zippy," he murmured.

Zippy darted behind Mrs. Dwight, and from his coat pocket slipped something that looked like an overgrown frankfurter. Only its leather skin was stuffed with lead.

Zippy handled that sap with beautiful dexterity. The blow which he delivered behind Mrs. Dwight's ear seemed hardly more than a tap.

Mrs. Dwight said, "Uh-h-h—"

And down she went like a spangled elephant brained by a tent pole.

High-pockets glanced carelessly at the other actors, and his oblique mouth twitched.

"Anybody else want some of that?"

Nobody did.

Zippy snatched the handkerchief from the table and, looking like a busy armadillo, went nimbly to work on Mrs. Dwight. First, her pearl necklace went into the handkerchief, then her diamonds.

What amazed Edward Napier was how quietly the audience sat. Nobody offered help; nobody peeped. Then suddenly he realized why. Of course! The audience thought this was part of the play! Mrs. Dwight's husband, who would have known better, was downstairs; before the show he had been fussing around in her dressing room.

Mrs. Dwight was naked of jewels now, and Zippy gathered the corners of the handkerchief together and handed it to High-pockets, who nonchalantly stuffed the gems into his topcoat and stepped over to the right-stage door.

Well, Napier thought, the play was ruined. From the first everything had gone wrong, and this was certainly the last straw. Maybe Lester Winterset III would be sobered up in time for tomorrow night's performance; maybe—

The man called Zippy halted directly in front of Edward Napier. And suddenly, a cool shiver raced down Napier's spine. Perhaps it was Zippy's eyes, so unnaturally large behind his glasses, or perhaps it was the way his lips were parted in a half-grin. All at once Napier thought:

"My God! He's going to shoot me! Why—"

And Napier started to his feet.

The automatic in Zippy's hand was not more than a yard from Napier's heart, and suddenly he squeezed it. At that point-blank

range, a miss would have been impossible.

Napier had not even fully gained his feet. For a second his face was stamped with a look of terror and astonishment, and then he pitched forward, striking the little table. The crystal globe hurtled off and shattered against the stage floor with a dreadful crash.

Napier's body slumped over the table and balanced weirdly for a moment. Then the table tipped. Edward Napier struck the floor.

Zippy danced over to the right-stage door from which High-pockets had already vanished. In the doorway Zippy stood for a moment, covering everybody.

Then, from the ticket office at the rear of the auditorium, a shot sounded. And another.

The audience was stirring from its stunned and horrified silence. A murmur which was altering to a throaty growl passed over it.

But just then, from the rear of the auditorium, came a voice. A voice deep and purposeful, issuing from the throat of a big man in a trench coat.

"Everybody sit down!" he bawled. "The first guy that moves gets plugged!"

So nobody moved.

Down the street a car came spattering toward the Little Theater. It was a light coupé, and lettered on its sides were the words: "Finlay's Drug Store. Always Highest Quality."

Jack Vicker, a high-school senior, was driving, making a delivery to the playhouse, where somebody with a headache had phoned for a bottle of pills.

Approaching the theater through the drizzle, Jack Vicker saw something odd. Toward the car in the

no-parking space, two men came dashing. Like rabbits plunging into a rabbit hole they tumbled into the sedan, and then a third man scrambled in. Big fellow, wearing a trench coat.

Out from that no-parking space the sedan curved lickety-split and screamed down the street in second gear.

Vicker prepared to park. But before he could pull in toward the curb, he saw the theater door leap open and a man dived down the steps and sprinted toward the street. His derby tumbled off, but he didn't stop to pick it up. Waving an arm, he yelled toward the coupé and yanked open the door.

"Three men. Did you see—"

"That sedan. Only there were four. One at the wheel and—"

"Step on it!" the man ordered, jumping into the coupé.

Vicker jammed his foot on the gas. Ahead, he saw the sedan reeling around the corner into Marshall Avenue.

"That's them!" Vicker yelled. "Their left tail light's out."

Marshall Avenue was a stop street, but when Vicker started slowing the man ordered:

"Don't stop!"

"Gee! I was nabbed last week for speeding. If I'm nabbed again they'll take my license—"

"Step on it! I'm from headquarters."

"Boy!" Vicker exclaimed. This was what he had always dreamed of. To drive as fast as he pleased. As the coupé rounded the corner, squealing taunts at the stop sign, Vicker yelled, "What happened?"

Briefly, Shepherd explained. His gaze was riveted on the sedan with one tail light. Although the pavement was rushing under the coupé's hood at airplane-takeoff speed, the

distance between the cars did not decrease.

Then Shepherd heard the question he was to hear many times during the next hours.

"If you're a detective, how come you let 'em get away with it?"

"I was in the play. I had to shoot a guy in the third act, so my gun is loaded with blanks."

"It's still loaded with blanks?"

Shepherd nodded.

Vicker eased up on the gas.

"Gosh! If they're armed, and we aren't—"

"Step on it! I want to see which road they take from town."

Vicker gripped the wheel. He put his thumb on the horn and kept it there, and jammed the gas to the floor. Wailing bloody murder, the coupé streaked down the avenue between lines of traffic.

"Say!" Vicker exclaimed. "I just remembered. There's a gun in that glove compartment. Mr. Finlay always keeps—"

Shepherd snapped open the compartment. The gun was a light automatic; it felt feather-light in his hand but it was loaded.

"There they go!" Vicker yipped.

The sedan's tail light sneered back from a street entering the avenue at a slant. Fairview Drive. As Shepherd remembered that edge-of-town neighborhood, the street would curl through a newly built area of wooded drives and fashionably named "circles" and "lanes" and "roads."

The coupé laid back its ears, roared up to the intersection and dashed along Fairview Drive. Street lights flashed past; the coupé swooped down a hill and started climbing; and then suddenly Vicker slammed his feet on clutch and brake, and the car slithered to a squealing halt.

Looming ahead was a circular

island around which the street flowed and where flowerbeds bloomed in summer. Not meant for speed, this street. Laid out to discourage speed, for this was a neighborhood of dogs and children. The coupé reversed savagely, then swished ahead around the island. Half a block beyond, the street branched, and Vicker sent the coupé zooming along the left inlet. A sign announced it was Woodland Pike.

"Saw them turn here when we came down that hill," Vicker said.

Shepherd nodded. He had lowered the window and the raw night lapped its wet tongue against his face. He wore no overcoat, for he had vaulted off the stage and skipped down the aisle as soon as the trench-coated man left the theater.

Moisture-beaded bushes whizzed past the coupé; the street curved; and then once again Vicker slammed on the brakes.

"Look, mister! It's their car, all right!"

He pointed down a narrow street, bounded by raw-clay lawns where houses loomed in various stages of construction. Half a block away, the street came to a dead-end halt, blocked by the underbrush and trees of what had been a timber patch till some real estate man got ambitious. At that dead end, its lights burning, the sedan had stopped.

"You stay here," Shepherd ordered. "Or you may get hurt."

But before he could snap open the door, his companion yanked the shift into low and the coupé nosed toward the dead end.

"I'm not afraid of getting hurt," Vicker said.

The coupé halted a few yards behind the sedan.

"Stay here in the car," Shepherd commanded. "That's an order. If there's shooting, you duck."

With the automatic ready, Shepherd jumped out and skimmed fast as a water bug toward the sedan. Not a shot sounded, and he halted behind the car. Peered through the rear window. It was empty.

Then he heard something. The whine of a starter, the racing of a warming motor.

He dashed around the sedan and waded into the mushy ground beyond the end of the street. Through the bushes and trees, he glimpsed headlights flashing on a block away.

A cold 'cuss word squeezed through his clenched teeth. He understood, now. And it was too late to do anything about it.

Over there through the timber, another newly-paved street curved into this real-estate development. Those mugs had evidently left a second getaway car parked in that street. They had driven down this dead-end street, piled out, trotted through the sodden timber, and scrambled into the waiting car. As he watched, its lights disappeared around a bend and the sound of its motor faded.

Shepherd plodded back to the paving, his shoes a mass of sticky clay.

"Got a flashlight?" he called.

Jack Vicker yelled, "Yep, I'll bring it. They got away, didn't they?"

"No," Shepherd said acidly. "I killed them all." Then he felt ashamed of his sarcasm. Vicker had been a good kid. So he added, "Sorry, son. It's just that I've got a lot on my mind."

Taking pains not to smudge any possible fingerprints, he used Vicker's flashlight and went over the sedan. It was registered in the name of Arnold Anderson, 2916 Tamway Street. A hot car, undoubtedly.

He found nothing of consequence in the sedan. Not unless you could call a tiny brown paper cup, such as

chocolate drops nest in, something of consequence. Probably Arnold Anderson or one of his kids had been eating candy.

Tucking the paper cup into his pocket, Shepherd said:

"I want you to stand guard here, kid. Don't let anybody touch this sedan till our fingerprint man has a chance at it. Understand?"

"Yes, sir! I sure do—"

"Here's your gat. I'll drive your coupé back to the theater. You can pick up a ride back in a prowler car."

"Geel!" Jack Vicker said.

III.

Squad cars and ambulances had stopped outside the theater, and a crowd clustered around the entrance. They eyed Shepherd curiously. Wordlessly, he marched up the steps and entered the building.

Inside, it looked like a policeman's ball, from the number of dicks and uniformed men there. Only there was no music, no dancing, no smiles.

Two sheeted figures lay on the floor of the box office, and on the stage another sheeted body.

In the pit of the theater Shepherd glimpsed Detective Inspector Marcus Halpin talking to some young men with pencils and folded sheets of paper. Reporters. One of them spied Shepherd and said:

"Here he is now."

Halpin revolved. He was a stocky, red-faced man of fifty, round-headed and bull-necked, and he had just about chewed up his cigar. He looked annoyed, but when his gaze met Shepherd's his right eye winked.

"Hello, sweetheart," he brayed. "Where you been? Eating ice cream?"

He sounded sore, but that wink told Shepherd to disregard his words.

"A malted milk," Shepherd said. "It was good." And then he told of his futile chase.

One reporter said, "This town's going to have roasted detective for breakfast. Yum, yum!"

And another: "You sure distinguished yourself tonight, Shepherd. Aren't you worried, inspector, that he'll be promoted to your job?"

"Promoted!" Halpin snorted. "You look for this guy tomorrow and you'll find him in a uniform. You'll find him in Taft Park seeing that the squirrels don't steal nuts from each other."

"What I want to know," a third reporter said, "is who will protect him from the squirrels?"

Shepherd smiled faintly. Despite their razzing, he knew that the boys from the press didn't really blame him. But they would probably fry him alive—in print. The newspapers were in a dog fight with the police commissioner, and they would make the most of their opportunity.

Then a door leading backstage opened and into the auditorium three people marched—two men and a woman. The woman was Mrs. H. Fellows Dwight, and she led the procession. When she saw Cliff Shepherd, she trundled over to him.

"Mr. Shepherd," she said freezingly, "I've heard of cowards. But I never thought I'd witness such a cowardly exhibition as you put on tonight."

"What did you want me to do, lady? Scare 'em by saying, 'Boo?'"

"Young fellow," snapped a dried-up little man in nose glasses, "that's my wife you're talking to!"

"You, an officer of the law," said Mrs. Dwight, "permitted that person to strike me!"

"You're lucky he didn't shoot you."

"Certainly it was through no hero-

ism of yours that he didn't."

Useless to argue with such people; useless to point out that if he had started rough-housing, those mugs would have ruthlessly shot down every one on the stage.

With a final contemptuous sniff, Mrs. Dwight drew her coat about her and swept from the theater, Mr. Dwight trailing her like a tugboat in the wake of a liner.

The man who had come from backstage with the Dwights extended his hand toward Shepherd.

"Let me say, Mr. Shepherd," he said, "that I disagree with the Dwights. I was in the audience, and I think you did the only thing a man in your position could do. I'm Mr. Parr, and you have my congratulations for remaining cool-headed."

Surprised but grateful, Shepherd shook Mr. Parr's hand. He nearly yelped, for Parr was a bone-crushing handshaker.

"A great virtue, cool-headedness," Mr. Parr added.

Wallace Parr was a big man in his middle fifties, with white hair but bushy black eyebrows. He had an eagle's nose. He owned a string of fashionable restaurants in the city, and he was quite active in the Little Theater. Several times he had dropped in at rehearsals, but Shepherd had never before met him.

After he had gone, Shepherd told Halpin:

"I want to get this grease paint off my face. Come down to the dressing room."

Downstairs, they passed through the "Green Room." It was a big, pleasant place with bright theatrical posters. Always after the final performance of a play, the cast held a gay party here. But it was not gay now.

On a davenport Helen Napier lay, her forearm shielding her eyes. Sev-



When Detective Shepherd saw Lester Winterset on the floor, he presumed he was dead drunk. But upon moving nearer he revised that presumption. Lester was not dead drunk; he was dead.

eral debts fluttered around her, but she lay motionless, inconsolable. When the debts saw Cliff Shepherd they sniffed like a pack of cats, and one meowed:

"Here comes our very brave detective."

Helen Napier sat up. Her cheeks were tear-stained and her chin quivered. Shepherd halted, feeling terrible. Then Mrs. Napier stood up and, looking brave, came toward him and put a hand on his wrist.

"Don't let anything they say bother you," she murmured. "Ed liked you, and I like you. You're true-blue, and you did all you could."

She turned back to the davenport, her shoulders drooping.

It got to him like a knife between his ribs. It made him want to trail those mugs and tangle with them. And next time he wouldn't be packing a gun loaded with blanks.

During the next two or three hours, a lot of routine activity took place, but when it was all over the "Playhouse Killers," as the press dubbed them, were no closer jail cells than before.

Radio stations of the city and State police kept growling for all officers to be on the lookout for four men. Type of car they were driving was unknown—because they had changed getaway cars. The theory was that the bandits had streaked madly out of town toward some hide-out scores or hundreds of miles away, so State patrolmen and county officers were especially urged to keep their eyes peeled.

As Shepherd had suspected, the sedan in which they had completed the first lap of their getaway proved to be sizzling hot: Mr. Arnold Anderson, an innocuous little grocer, had reported it stolen late that afternoon.

The expert from headquarters had discovered a few pretty good prints on the car, but they all had been left by members of the Anderson family. However, identifying all the bandits save the driver had been easy—from photos at headquarters. They had police records as long as a hangman's rope.

On the basis of those records, Shepherd concluded that the big man in the trench coat had bossed the job. His favorite name seemed to be Dave Kingward, and eleven months ago he had gone AWOL from Rock Canyon Prison in a western State. Before residing in Rock Canyon, his usual occupation had been bringing gray hair to bank presidents by making large withdrawals—at the point of a gun.

The name of the man called Zippy proved to be Lawrence Mox, while the fellow with long legs was Pete Wainstell.

None of the department's stool pigeons remembered seeing this trio in the city. Hotels, lodginghouses, and cabin camps were still being checked, but thus far no evidence of their back trail had been uncovered.

"And yet," Shepherd told Halpin, "they must have been in town for a week at least. They didn't pull off that job cold turkey."

Halpin nodded, mournfully chewing his cigar. They were sitting in Shepherd's office.

"Maybe more than a week," Shepherd continued. "That job was cased. They knew what they were doing. They knew about Mrs. Dwight's rocks, and they must have known she'd wear 'em in the play."

Shepherd stood up and paced, stopping finally by the window where he stood scowling through the night-blackened glass. The wet streets gleamed like rivers, and the

ranks of distant skyscrapers rose in misty gray cliffs.

"If they've been here," he thought aloud, "they've been living somewhere. It must be good, or our stools would have got wind of 'em. Of course, there was a fourth man in that car. The driver. If we knew who he was—maybe he was a local mug, and maybe they've been living with him. And if it's a good place—maybe they're in it now."

"What?" Halpin gruffed.

"I said if it's a good hide-out, maybe they've gone back to it. Maybe they figure to stay there till things cool off. Why should they chase away along highways with their shirt tails out?"

"Naw," Halpin said, "I don't think—" He, too, stood up, and he, too, prowled back and forth, chewing thoughtfully. "Still," he admitted, "maybe—"

He halted, feet apart, slowly nodding as the idea soaked through his brain. Then he squared his shoulders and exclaimed indignantly:

"Damn it, Cliff, that makes me mad! If they think this town would be safe after what they've pulled—"

"Take it easy. It's just a theory."

"A theory, is it? Well, if you ask me, it's a good one, at that! Sure! Why would they chase from town? Hide where they've been hidin'. That's logic. But it makes me boil—" Then he asked, "Any idea where this hide-out would be?"

Shepherd shook his head, sat down at his desk.

"So there we are," Halpin growled, "runnin' in circles like a blamed merry-go-round."

Shepherd was expecting a phone call, and while waiting he gazed at several objects on his desk blotter and finally picked up two of them. They were identical—little brown

paper cups, such as chocolate drops nest in.

Arnold Anderson had maintained that none of his family had eaten candy in his car, and certainly none of the Andersons had dropped the second paper cup in the playhouse box office.

Now, for the tenth time, Shepherd examined the cups. Embossed on the bottom of each was a figure, but Shepherd couldn't make out what it was supposed to represent.

"Looks like a hammer," he murmured. "Or maybe a mallet. Maybe a croquet mallet."

Halpin's blunt fingers took one cup; he held it at different angles, scowling.

"They didn't do a good job of stamping it," he grumbled. "Ain't clear— Naw, it ain't a mallet. Maybe a sledge. Didn't Breheny find out anything?"

Shepherd shook his head. Detective Phil Breheny had spent an hour trying to discover if there existed a brand of chocolates known as Hammer or Mallet or some such brand.

"He checked with a couple of department-store candy buyers. And with some candy wholesalers. They'd never heard of such a brand." And he added, "I wish Irwin would phone."

Irwin was sports editor of the *Morning Beacon*. When Shepherd called him he had been out of his office for a few minutes. So Shepherd had left word about the information he wanted, with the request that Irwin call him back.

There were two remaining objects on the blotter—pocketknives. One, a light penknife, had been discovered in Cressingham's pants pocket. The other had been lying on the floor beside his body.

"And why," muttered Inspector

Halpin, "would Cressingham carry two knives?"

Shepherd picked up the second knife. It was heavy, and stamped into its silver handle was the seal of the Tamarack Field and Country Club. Nothing odd about that—Cressingham had belonged to the country club. Probably when he was ordered to cut the phone wire, he had brought out this knife, pried open the blade.

Shepherd turned the knife over and once again studied the words engraved on its back.

"Diving Championship," they said. "Silver Anniversary Festival. Tamarack Field and Country Club."

That was all. The name of the diving-championship winner had not been engraved there.

Shepherd leaned back in his chair, his fingers laced behind his head.

"Cressingham didn't look like much of an athlete to me," he said. "Don't think I've ever seen his name in the sports pages. I remember that Silver Anniversary Festival was held last summer, but I can't remember who won the events. But I'm pretty sure Cressingham didn't win anything."

"Why ain't the winner's name on the knife?"

Shepherd said, "They would order the trophies from a jeweler before the festival. With an arrangement that the winners' names would be engraved on after the events. Whoever won this didn't give a hang evidently whether his name was engraved on it or not."

"You'll likely find out it was Cressingham who won it after all," Halpin said moodily.

But he was a poor prophet, for presently the phone rang and Irwin was on the line. Shepherd asked a few questions and listened gravely,

and after hanging up he was silent for a moment.

"Well," said Halpin, "who—"

"Winterset," Shepherd said quietly. "That diving championship was won by Lester Winterset III. So this knife belongs to him."

"Hm-m-m. Well, maybe Cressingham borrowed the knife from Winterset."

"Could be."

"But you don't think so? What's buzzing in your head, anyhow?"

Shepherd stood up and wandered to the window, where he stood drumming the sill.

"It was odd," he mused, "the way Ed Napier was killed. Uncalled for. Shot down in cold blood—"

"What's Napier got to do with—"

"Winterset," Shepherd said, "took the part of the Hindu in that play. He phoned Napier tonight he couldn't go on. So Napier took the part. They're about the same build, and in all that dark make-up and with that turban and costume you couldn't have told one from the other. Maybe Winterset was due to get shot."

"You're takin' the curves too fast for me," said Inspector Halpin.

"Somebody cased that job for those mugs. Someone who knew the layout. Well, Winterset knew it. He was in the play."

"Uh. But—"

"Let's say Winterset was the brain guy. Maybe Kingward was at his place and saw that knife and swiped it. Maybe Cressingham didn't take it out of his pocket. After all, we found one knife in his pocket. Why would he carry two? Maybe Kingward handed him this knife and told him to cut the phone wire."

"Now, Cliff, I don't think—"

"Just for argument, let's say Winterset was the brain guy. Maybe at the last minute he lost his nerve and

told those mugs the deal was off. They wouldn't listen to that. So Winterset phoned he couldn't be in the play. He thought if he stayed away there wouldn't be a performance. He didn't think Napier would take the role. Well, the mugs thought Winterset was yellow and decided to kill him. They knew he was the Hindu, so they shot the Hindu. But the Hindu was Napier."

"Sure, sure," Halpin said, "a fine theory—maybe. But why would Kingward leave Winterset's knife where we could find it?"

Shepherd shrugged. "Why do mugs do anything? Maybe he thought we'd find it and spend a lot of time tracing it to Winterset. Wasted time—for he thought Winterset was the Hindu and the Hindu was shot."

"Naw, Cliff," Halpin growled, "I don't think Winterset would be mixed up in it. He's one of them swells. How would he know mugs like Kingward?"

Shepherd gave him a quick look. "Didn't you know? About Winterset?"

"What about him?"

"I thought you knew. He's the Winterset who was in Fort Henry Reformatory from 1935 to 1937. Manslaughter. He was driving stewed, and bumped off an old guy with his car."

Halpin's teeth clicked together through his soggy cigar.

"So! He's been in stir. Get on your hat and coat and we'll go out and see the guy."

"I'm going," Shepherd said, "alone. Friendly call. We were in the play together—we're friends. I'll find out more that way."

Just then, the door opened and a a red-haired dick named Murphy grinned in and dumped some newspapers on Shepherd's desk.

"The press," he said, "did a pretty fair job of skinning alive. I've got a doc ready to treat you gents for apoplexy."

IV.

Inspector Halpin didn't succumb to apoplexy when he read those stories, but he ate a couple of cigars without salt or pepper and made sounds like an irritated bull.

Cliff Shepherd read the stories in bitter silence. But a narrowing of his eyes, a hardening of his mouth, and a reddening of his ears betrayed his cold rage.

Since the press had sent reporters to cover the show, stories of the crime were eye-witness accounts. Scornfully, they told how Cliff Shepherd, a servant of the people, had meekly permitted the bandits to rob and kill and escape.

"Shepherd's excuse for his Caspar Milquetoast behavior," said the *Times-Bulletin* in a front page editorial, "is that his revolver was loaded with blanks. The people of this community have the right to know why the head of the homicide bureau carried a gun loaded with blanks. Is that the kind of ammunition all our police use?"

On and on the papers raved, in that vein. They had the department and the commissioner over a barrel, and they didn't muff their opportunity. Never a word in extenuation did they whisper: no mention that Shepherd had taken the role under protest; that he was off duty; that he couldn't very well have used actual bullets in his gun, since he was to fire it in the third act and "kill" another member of the cast.

"Plainly," screeched the *Times-Bulletin*, "a drastic housecleaning is in order. Commissioner Kimball should be recalled on the grounds of being grossly incompetent. Chief

McConkey, Inspector Halpin, and Shepherd should be committed to some nice quiet old ladies' home."

Shepherd was quivering with rage when he left headquarters, climbed into his light sedan and drove across town. But anger, he told himself, was a luxury he couldn't afford just now, so he forced himself to think of the business at hand. Of Winterset.

Shepherd didn't much like Lester Winterset III. He was a bachelor in his early thirties, with slick black hair and beady black eyes. Years before, the Wintersets had been a leading family in business and civic affairs, but the family had gone to seed, wasted its money, and died or moved away. Its sole representative in Tamarack now was Lester, who would have been a black sheep in any family.

In his younger days he had been wild, gambling and chasing around with dubious women, and that phase of his life had culminated in his manslaughter conviction.

After serving two years, Lester had been pardoned by the governor, who had been a friend of the first Lester Winterset.

Lester returned to his native city with bitterness in his eyes. When most of his old friends cut him, the bitterness increased. He was thick-skinned, people said, for he refused to be frozen out of his old haunts. Gradually, with a kind of grudging admiration for his brass, people relented toward him. And they became positively cordial when, two years ago, he founded a fortnightly paper which he called *Man About Town*.

Man About Town exuded smartness and sophistication, and whenever a new issue appeared people snatched it up and devoured it, not because they hoped to discover their names but because they dreaded it.

Lester had a sharp tongue and a kind of bitter courage, and he wrote with a malicious pen. Since childhood he had known the "best" people of town, and he was without illusions concerning them. He proceeded upon the theory that every man's closet concealed a skeleton. And people whispered that Lester was not above hinting about those skeletons when he solicited advertising.

The theory must have been sound, for *Man About Town* prospered. Lester elevated backstairs gossip to the dignity of journalism, and made it pay.

Winterset lived alone at a "good" address on Hargrave Drive. Several weeks before, after a rehearsal, he had entertained the cast at a midnight snack, so Shepherd had been there before. *Man About Town* was published from that address, which sounded better in print than it really was.

For Winterset actually dwelt in an apartment above a private garage. The garage stood behind a great stone house on Hargrave Drive, and once Lester's quarters had been occupied by servants. But Mrs. Penden, a widow who owned the house, had suffered financial reverses, so she fired her servants and remodeled their quarters into an income property.

Her house was dark tonight. Shepherd turned from the street and followed the drive back to the garage, where a window in Winterset's apartment showed a glint of light behind drawn curtains. Napier had said that Winterset's tongue sounded thick on the phone, and Shepherd recalled rumors of how Winterset sometimes retired from the world and stayed drunk for days.

A ground-floor door opened into a tiny vestibule from which steps ascended to the apartment. It was

dark, and Shepherd snapped on his flashlight. At the top of the narrow, curving stairs he was confronted by another door, locked. He pounded its heavy panels.

Nobody responded, so he knocked again, and finally called:

"Winterset. Open up."

Still no response.

After more knocking, he gave up and returned downstairs. A door led from the vestibule into the garage, and it was unlocked.

The garage was spacious enough to house half a dozen cars, but except for an oil-burning furnace which was humming to keep Lester's apartment warm, the garage was vacant. Flashing his light, Shepherd spied a ladder lying against the wall. He unlatched one of the wide garage doors and dragged the ladder outside.

He propped it against the side of the building and climbed toward a window which, if he remembered the apartment layout correctly, would open into the kitchen.

The window was locked. He hesitated a moment, remembering the squawks the newspapers were always making about the lawless police, about houses searched without benefit of warrants. Huh! A lot those editorial writers knew about the grim business of crime. With the butt of his revolver, Shepherd struck the windowpane.

Glass tinkled, and an aperture gaped above the catch lock. His fingers darted inside and twisted the catch. Then he raised the sash.

His flashlight revealed a sink below the window, and he moved meticulously as he entered, lest his soles slip on the slick porcelain. Once inside, he put down the window and followed his flashlight toward the swinging door.

There was no dining room. It was

a "studio-apartment," with about half the floor space given over to a big living room. An arty place, with great windows and a stone fireplace and bright papier-mâché masks hanging on the knotty-pine walls. One corner served as Lester's office, with a flat desk and steel files. A floor lamp was burning cheerily beside a chintz-covered davenport.

As Shepherd came through the swinging door he was enswathed by the odor of whiskey, so when he saw Lester Winterset lying on the floor he presumed he was dead drunk. But upon moving nearer he revised that presumption. Lester was not dead drunk; he was dead.

In life, Lester Winterset III had not been a handsome man; his muddy-brown skin and slick hair and cold black eyes had always caused Shepherd to feel that in some former existence he had been a serpent.

He was less handsome in death. He lay on his back wearing a maroon bathrobe, a blue shirt and old gray flannels. His mouth was wide open, his lips pulled back over gleaming teeth. Wound around his throat was the belt from his bathrobe; choked to death.

A few feet away a quart whiskey bottle lay. It was uncorked, and its liquid fire had run out and soaked a hooked rug on the hardwood floor.

Except for the corpse and the spilled whiskey, the room exhibited no signs of violence. No upset furniture; not even a wrinkled rug.

Whatever the quality of his moral fiber, Lester had been no physical weakling. He had won that country-club diving championship, and his body was well-muscled. So to Shepherd that indicated that Lester had not been expecting to be killed. There had been no struggle. He had

freely admitted the murderer to his apartment.

Shepherd knelt and lifted the corpse's head. At the base of the skull he found an ugly bruise. That whiskey bottle? Probably. Very likely the murderer had seized the bottle as if to drink, but instead had batted it against Lester's head, and then, with his victim unconscious, had yanked the bathrobe belt from its loops and used it as a noose.

Time of death? Shepherd sighed. His guess would be within the last two or three hours, but he'd leave that to the docs.

He stood up and moved toward the desk phone, but before lifting the instrument he decided against calling headquarters yet.

"I'll let it ride for a while," he thought. "Lester's not going away."

Meditatively, he lit a cigarette and prowled about the big room. All the furnishings suggested a person loving the good things of life. Maybe Lester had wanted a lot of money fast and had thought of Mrs. Dwight's gems. And then turned yellow. So the mugs had killed him. But wait!

So far as the playhouse bandits knew, they had left Winterset dead upon the stage—dead in his Hindu costume. But perhaps after changing getaway cars they had come here and found him still alive. But that seemed doubtful. Lester Winterset would scarcely have planned for them to hole in here, with old Mrs. Penden likely to nose in.

Moreover, the men who killed those people at the playhouse would scarcely have choked Lester to death. Not their way. They would have nudged a gun into his ribs and loaded him into a car and shot him and left his body in some weedy lot. They were professional gunmen, and this looked like an amateur job.

Shepherd moved along a short hall, off which opened a bathroom, a bedroom. Everything was undisturbed. In the bedroom he opened the closet door and glanced inside. Many spruce-looking suits were hanging in perfect order, and the shoes on the floor were arrayed like soldiers at attention.

He noticed something on the floor at the end of the closet, and flashed on his light. But it was only a stack of steel filing cases, with the word "Carbons" typed upon the tabs on the front of the drawers.

He closed the door and scrutinized the bedroom. The bed was spread without a wrinkle, and on the highboy the comb and military brushes were laid out with geometric precision. Opening the highboy doors, he saw in one compartment a stack of crisp shirts, and in the other a series of three shallow drawers containing studs and cuff links and odds and ends.

Toward the back of one drawer he saw something gleaming, and he pulled the drawer out farther.

The object that had snared his attention was a pocketknife. A silver knife bearing the seal of the Tamarack Field and Country Club stamped into its handle. Shepherd turned it over and on the back read the words: "Diving Championship. Silver Anniversary Festival. Tamarack Field and Country Club."

"I'm a son of a gun!" Shepherd murmured aloud.

He returned to the living room, snapped on the desk lamp and sat down, scrutinizing the knife. It was in every way identical with the knife that had been lying on the box-office floor beside Cressingham's body. He would have thought that perhaps Lester had won the diving championship at the country-club pool two different years, save for the words, "Sil-

ver Anniversary Festival." In the lifetime of a person or a club, a silver anniversary came but once.

Two identical knives— Shepherd stood up and paced about the room. Why had Winterset been awarded two trophies for one event? And why had his name been inscribed on neither?

At the desk again, he picked up the phone, but instead of dialing headquarters he called the *Morning Beacon* and asked for Irwin in the sports department.

"This is Shepherd again. About that Silver Anniversary Festival—do you remember whether there was a committee in charge of it?"

"Yeah, Cliff, there was a committee. But I don't remember who all was on it."

"Could you look it up?"

"Sure—we probably ran a preliminary story on it. Want me to look it up and call you back?"

"I'll hold the line."

"Cops," Irwin snorted, "are a nuisance. All right, hold the phone. But that festival's ancient history. I don't see why you're so interested in it."

Shepherd didn't tell him.

Waiting, he picked up a pencil and drew a memorandum pad toward him.

Seemed that Irwin was taking a long time. His gaze wandered over the desk. A city directory and a volume called "Leaders In Tamarrack" stood within easy reach, but attracting his interest more was a stack of magazines, copies of *Man About Town*. On top of the pile was the latest issue, and as he thumbed through the magazines he saw that this was a complete file of every number.

Then Irwin's voice came over the wire.

"Cliff? Finally found what you

wanted. There were three men on that committee."

Shepherd wrote down their names. Emery Ridgeford. Wallace Parr. H. Fellows Dwight.

V.

During the next few minutes a casual observer would have concluded that Cliff Shepherd had lost all interest in the case. Ignoring the corpse on the floor, smoking leisurely, he cocked his feet on Lester Winterset's desk and read magazines.

The magazines were all copies of *Man About Town*, and Shepherd didn't appear to be reading them very thoroughly. Beginning with the top issue on the deck, he leafed through each copy rather quickly. Sometimes he read the caption beneath a racy cartoon and smiled, but he appeared to be interested mainly in the advertisements.

And after he had gone through every issue, he picked up the pad on which he had jotted the committee members' names. All three men had been consistent and fairly heavy advertisers in *Man About Town*.

As a restaurant owner, Wallace Parr advertised "Parr's For Food Par Excellence." These were half-page and sometimes full-page advertisements.

H. Fellows Dwight's name did not appear in his advertising, but Shepherd knew that he was president and chief stockholder in the Knight And Lady Beauty Products Co., which from the first issue of *Man About Town* had used a full-page ad.

Emery Ridgeford's advertising was usually more modest. He owned the conservative, long-established and trustworthy Fidelity Jewelry Co. "Manufacturing and Retail Jew-

elers," said his ad. "Emery Ridgeford, Manager."

Shepherd reached for the book, "Leaders In Tamarack." It had been published several years ago, and although it imparted useful information in its biographical paragraphs, it smacked of polite racketeering. A couple of bright young men had come to town and, taking advantage of human vanity, had compiled the volume. Their definition of a "leader" was broad enough to include anybody willing to pay ten dollars for a copy of the book. For twenty-five dollars the "leader's" picture would also be published.

Cliff Shepherd himself had been solicited, but he had been without both that sort of vanity and the necessary ten-spot.

Turning to the "P" section, he sought, but failed to find, a biography of Wallace Parr. His opinion of Parr's good sense ascended. In the "R" section he discovered that Emery Ridgeford had been a sucker, but only a ten-dollar sucker; his picture was not there. Shepherd jotted down a few salient facts. He was sixty-four. A widower. Member of the Pioneer, Loiterer's and Field and Country Club. Which were the three best clubs in town. Winter home in Arizona.

Biographies of both Mr. and Mrs. H. Fellows Dwight appeared in the book, along with their pictures. Fifty-dollar suckers. Although not a Pioneer, Mr. Dwight was a Loiterer and, of course, a member of the Field and Country Club.

Shepherd put down the book and sat for a few moments in thought. He had heard the rumors that Lester Winterset used what amounted to blackmail to gain advertising, and he wondered now how true those rumors had been. Had he threatened

Parr or Dwight or Emery Ridgeford with malicious, smirking paragraphs of gossip unless they advertised?

It was possible; certainly Winterset, with his snaky personality, would have been capable of that. But, on the other hand, it was possible that those three men had advertised in *Man About Town* because it was a good medium.

Shepherd went to the stack of steel files beside the desk and pulled open the top drawer. Its folders harbored receipted bills, canceled checks, many of them drawn to the Tamarack Printing Co., in whose plant *Man About Town* was printed. The second drawer held more business folders. Shepherd found them uninformative. But the bottom drawer contained more interesting material.

There was a row of filing folders, their tabs lettered from A to Z. Some were fat, some slender. Shepherd pulled out the "R" folder and carried it to the desk. Upon the loose sheets there was typed information about half a dozen persons whose names began with "R."

One sheet said:

Ridgeford, Emery. I've known this old fool since I was in short pants. He was up to his ears in the deal when the city bought the traction company. Rumor that he cleared a hundred thousand in that deal. He held some traction-company stock and they say he jacked up the price the city paid by about a half million. He paid income tax that year on a net income of around seven thousand. How about the rumored hundred grand? Might run something like this: "What well-known jeweler is troubled with insomnia these nights because he is fearful that there will be curiosity about his income-tax returns of some years back?" Also, might mention the story that when Jasper Cressingham returned suddenly from New York he found a hat in his hall that didn't belong to him. On sweatband the initials, E. R. Also, they say H. Fellows Dwight is sore at Ridgeford because Ridgeford's blackball kept

Dwight out of Pioneer Club. Doubt the truth of this. Dwight is good customer of Ridgeford; doubt if he'd blackball Dwight. But someone did. This will bear looking into. See Dwight file.

Cliff Shepherd pursed his lips and whistled soundlessly. And, glancing at Winterset's corpse, he thought, "You rat. You methodical rat. You must have catalogued everyone you knew!"

And then suddenly Shepherd thought, "I wonder if he embalmed me, too!"

He pulled out the "S" file.

And sure enough, there on a sheet of paper were the words:

Shepherd, Cliff. About thirty-five. Silent, inclined to be sarcastic. He's sore about something—maybe because police commissioner ordered him to be in play. Must look into this. Does police commissioner have goods on Shepherd? Also, seems to me that Mrs. Napier is especially nice to Shepherd. Is there an attraction there?

Shepherd snorted. And gave Winterset's corpse a scowl. He thought: "Why, you low-minded rat! Attraction! She knew I was mad, and she was just being nice to me!"

And it occurred to Shepherd that Winterset had certainly been laying himself open to be murdered. Only impersonal smiles of encouragement had come to him from Mrs. Napier. But Winterset's sharp eyes had noted those smiles and typed a record of them. Winterset's mind, soaked in the acid of cynicism, must have suspected everybody of ulterior motives.

With that disposition, how Winterset must have made the people sweat who really had skeletons in their closets! It was a wonder he hadn't been bumped off long ago!

Pulling out the "P" filing folder, Shepherd ran through its biographical sheets, but he found nothing

concerning Wallace Parr. Odd. Parr had not been mentioned in "Leaders In Tamarack," and apparently he was not represented in Winterset's biographical file. How come? Like Ridgeford and Dwight, he had advertised generously in *Man About Town*. Well, possibly Winterset had discovered no skeletons in his closet and Parr had advertised simply because he knew the magazine was circulated among smart people whom he hoped to lure into his restaurants.

Shepherd ran a forefinger along the filing folders, toward the "D" tab. But there was no "D" folder. There was a "C" folder and an "E," but no "D."

And it would be the "D" folder which would contain the facts of H. Fellows Dwight's life.

And suddenly a picture flashed through Shepherd's mind. He saw H. Fellows Dwight coming here from the Little Theater, after learning that the actor in Hindu costume had been not Winterset, but Napier. Dwight would knock and call out, "Let me in, Lester. It's H. Fellows Dwight."

Dwight was a small, dried-up man. In strength he would have been no match for Winterset, even though Winterset was liquored up.

But Dwight's wits could have out-matched Winterset. He could have cracked his skull with a bottle and knocked him out and then choked him.

Shepherd's pulse beat faster. The implications of that theory were tremendous. And all the jigsaw pieces fitted together. Or did they?

Shepherd scowled and reviewed what he knew about the case. For the moment, he discarded the assumption that Winterset had been in any way responsible for the play-

house holdup. Perhaps his crime had been blackmailing Dwight. About what? Impossible to guess. But it must have been something pretty dark in Dwight's past.

So Dwight, knowing that Winterset was to be the Hindu, had plotted the holdup. The bandits' reward would be his wife's gems—which were doubtless heavily insured. So he would be protected there.

His one stipulation to the bandits would be that they slay the Hindu. And that they not slay his wife. Merely knock her out. Even Mrs. Dwight might have been in the know. Perhaps her astonishment and disdain of the bandits had been mere acting.

Dwight had been a member of the country-club festival committee. The committee had purchased the trophies. Where had they purchased them? Where else but from the jewelry establishment of Emery Ridgford, who also was a committee member?

Perhaps when Dwight conceived the crime he went to the jewelry store and told some yarn such as that Lester Winterset had lost his trophy and had asked the committee to furnish him another. In that way, Dwight had obtained a duplicate knife.

This he had given to Dave Kingward, instructing him to leave it in the box office. That would point suspicion at Winterset. And Winterset would be a dead Hindu. The police would not question him, but they would deduce that he had met the bandits because of his prison connections and had cased the holdup for them.

But things went wrong because Winterset started drinking and phoned Napier he wouldn't be at the theater for the opening performance.

Had Dwight known that Napier

was substituting for Winterset? Well, supposing he had learned it shortly before curtain time? What could he do? The crime had been planned, and probably the bandits were hiding some place where he couldn't call them and warn them not to kill the Hindu.

As soon as possible, acting speedily before the police learned that the knife had belonged to Winterset, Dwight had come here, slain Winterset, and removed the file containing the dread information that Winterset had used in levering open Dwight's check book.

It looked good. Scarcely airtight, perhaps, but very good. Of course, before Shepherd dared arrest a man of Dwight's standing, or even question him, he wanted more information. He would get in touch with Emery Ridgford and ask if any committee member had ordered a duplicate knife.

There were still a few question marks parachuting through Shepherd's thinking. First, how had an eminently respectable man like Dwight got in touch with mugs like Kingward? And where had the bandits hidden before the crime, and where were they now? Who was the driver of their car—the fourth man? And what about those paper cups that candy had nested in? Possibly those cups had no significance, but Shepherd felt that if he could learn what brand of chocolates they were—Hammer, Mallet, or something like that—he might trace purchasers of that brand. The fact that the brand was so unusual that no candy buyer had heard of it would make tracing easier.

He picked up the telephone book and found Emery Ridgford's number. But before he dialed, he hesitated. Away off at the edge of his consciousness, a faint thought was



The man Shepherd shot at reeled half around on his heel; his gun hand flopped down to drop the automatic, and then he pitched to the ground.

tapping to be admitted, but when he opened his mind to it it raced away. He had a vague, uneasy, nagging sense that he was forgetting something. He wished that thought would take shape.

He dialed. A formal voice said, "Mr. Ridgeford's residence."

Sounded like a butler.

"I want to speak to Ridgeford."

The voice said, "That is impossible, sir. Unless you call him in Arizona."

"Arizona!"

"Yes, sir. That's where Mr. Ridgeford winters. He has been in Arizona since November. We expect him home in about a week."

Nuts!

Then Shepherd had an afterthought and asked, "Who is in charge of his business while he is away?"

"His business, sir? Why, you'll have to call Mr. Clyde Belton. Mr. Belton is in charge."

Shepherd hung up, snapped through the phone directory. But before he found Belton's name the thing he had been forgetting hit him. He dropped the directory and took long strides toward Winterset's bedroom.

What he found there turned the case upside down, inside out. It told him where the bandits were probably hiding, if they were still in the vicinity.

VI.

During the next two hours Shepherd worked like a dog. Nay! Harder than any dog he ever had heard of.

He called at the modest home of Clyde Belton and plied that man with questions. On his way back to headquarters, pursuing a tip Belton had given him, he stopped his car outside the imposing Pioneer Club and alighted. He intended entering, but he did not. For, approaching the door, he happened to glance up. And there above the door he beheld an important clue flaunting itself to the public gaze.

He grinned. For the first time since entering the cast of "Murder Is So Jolly" he felt happy.

At headquarters, he found that Inspector Halpin had gone home to bed. Good! Let him snore—for a while. Inside Shepherd's head the case was rapidly unraveling, and till he was sure of everything he wanted it all to remain inside his head.

Without explaining what it was all about, he gave orders to his dicks;

each did piecemeal labor.

And finally, he put in a long-distance call to the West Coast. It was so satisfactory that elation sang through his blood like a cocktail.

Then he called Inspector Halpin. Halpin sounded sleepy and Shepherd said, "I hope I woke you up, you old mick."

"Don't call me a mick," Halpin said.

"All right, you old buzzard. I just wanted to tell you we're about ready to roll, and you'd better come down to headquarters."

"I ain't a buzzard, either. You know something, don't you? You never call me a buzzard unless you know something. Did you arrest Winterset?"

"No. He was dead. Bumped."

"Bumped! What the—"

"I won't talk," Shepherd said. "I know my constitutional rights and I won't talk. Not on the phone. Good-by, you old buzzard."

Grinning, Shepherd hung up.

The city slept, for the clocks of town indicated that the wee, small hours of morning had been reached. Most honest men had long been slumbering in their beds. In the arteries of town the bloodstream of traffic had thinned to a trickle, so when three motor cars left headquarters and sped along the avenues, their progress was fast.

The dank March skies had long since wept themselves out, but in the bare branches of trees ghostly mist was tangled, and above the wet pavement occasional mist-ghosts wandered, like apparitions that had lost their cemetery addresses.

The three cars did not bear official license plates, nor was their voyaging heralded by sirens or flashing spotlights. A casual observer would have supposed they contained revel-

ers hurrying home from some late party.

Instead, they contained guns; and men who knew how to use guns. Some uniformed men. Some men in plain clothes. Inspector Halpin rode in that motorcade, and Cliff Shepherd, and a man from the State bureau of investigation. His presence removed a technical illegality from the expedition. For after traversing Marshall Avenue and Fairview Drive, the three cars crossed the city limits and drove into the country beyond city police authority.

Cliff Shepherd was in command. He drove his own sedan, and Inspector Halpin sat beside him, lunching on a cigar. Halpin was gloomy, only half-convinced that the expedition would not prove a wild-goose chase.

"I know, Cliff, I know," he had growled. "It looks all right. But I'd rather go out to that guy's home and arrest him—"

"And have him hire a dozen lawyers and maybe get loose? And maybe the mugs would slide through our hands. Nope. I want to surprise him. Panic him. Bag all of them at once."

"O. K.," Halpin had grumbled. "But it's your baby. You're in charge. But if it's a firecracker that goes off in your hands, the newspapers will nail your hide to the barn door."

"Damn the papers! They're going to have indigestion tomorrow, anyhow. From eating their words."

Shepherd's car led the procession, and after it had left city pavement and had slopped along a gravel road for a couple of miles, it drew to a halt. The two cars behind it halted, also. Then Shepherd's car moved on. By prearrangement, the other two cars waited, each following

Shepherd's car at well spaced intervals.

The halt had been made at the bottom of a grade, and as Shepherd followed the curving road up the hill he kept glancing to his right. He saw bur-oak timberland and then, toward the crest, a closed gate which separated the road from a long driveway. Back there among the trees, he could make out a long, low house, in white-painted Colonial style. No light showed from the house.

"They're in there," Shepherd told Halpin.

"You mean you think they're in there."

"They've got to be. It all adds up. This place is only about three miles from where they changed getaway cars."

"And if they ain't in there—"

"Then we'll try your plan. Just arrest him."

"How about a phone in this house?"

"There isn't one. I checked that with the phone company. Our man bought this house from old Felix McVey last fall. It never had a phone. McVey used it as a place to rest up in over week ends, and I suppose his nerves wanted a rest from phone calls. Maybe our man wanted the same thing. Anyhow, there's no phone. He can't call them. He'll have to drive out."

"You're sure this is the place McVey owned?"

"Sure, I'm sure," Shepherd said. "McVey's name is still on that R. F. D. mailbox. I saw it just now. Besides, I remember when McVey built it. I always liked the place. Thought I'd like to own one like it."

"Well," sighed Halpin, "you never will. Honest dicks don't get rich. They get shot, but they don't get rich."

"What's the matter with you tonight?" Shepherd grinned. "Your liver upset?"

"Naw, not my liver. My wife. Some day," Halpin said lugubriously, "I'll turn her loose on this town and she'll scare away all the crooks fast."

The bur-oak estate had dropped behind, and Shepherd pulled to a stop at the roadside. In the back seat the harness bulls stirred sleepily. Presently the second car halted behind Shepherd's, and then the third. Headlights were doused; everybody piled out. There were fifteen men, altogether, and before they tramped back along the drenched road Shepherd issued orders.

"In five minutes," he said, consulting his watch, "Johnny O'Burke is going to make a phone call from headquarters. He'll pretend to be a farmer. That call will set things going. We've got about twenty minutes to get deployed."

He was nervous tonight. Couldn't sleep. Which was senseless. For everything would be all right now. There had been one tremendous hitch—Winterset's failure to enact his role in the play—but he had gone directly from the theater to Winterset's and killed him.

It was ironical how in the end he had been compelled to do what he had so assiduously planned not to do—kill Winterset with his own hands. But he had not hesitated, once he discovered that the man in the Hindu costume was not Winterset. Once you embarked upon a course there was no turning back, without disaster.

He was sitting in the living room of his small but richly appointed apartment at Wellington Terrace. He held a half-empty highball glass, and now and then he sipped a drink.

He had realized that he was nervous, but not until the telephone rang did he realize how extremely taut his nerves were drawn. He jumped when it rang and dashed toward it; then took hold of himself. He let it ring several times. And when he finally answered, he was in command of his nerves.

"Mr. Parr?"

"Yes."

The voice on the wire had a farmer's twang.

"This is Eb Perkins. I'm your neighbor, out near your country place. You ain't out here tonight."

"No, of course not. I'm at my apartment in town."

"Are any of your friends at your country place?"

Parr thought fast, hesitated, then said: "No. The house is empty tonight."

"Then you'll be glad I called you. I said I thought I'd better but Anna—she's my old woman—Anna told me I'd best keep my nose out of it. But I'll bet you're glad I called."

"What are you trying to tell me?" Wallace Parr asked.

"Jest this. Few minutes ago me and Anna was driving home from visiting her sister up in Calhoun county. We had a puncture right smack in front of that dude place you bought from old man McVey. And you know, it was a funny thing but I couldn't find my jack in the car. Don't know what went with it."

"Well, sir, I saw a light in your house, so I says to Anna, 'I'll jest go in and ask Mr. Parr if he's got a jack I could borrow.' As I walked up to the house I heard a lot of loud laughing and then some fellers singing inside. They were singing 'Show Me The Way To Go Home,' like as they was drunk."

"I knocked, and you know what? One of 'em come to the door and

pointed a revolver at me, that's what! Told me to clear out. Thought I'd best phone you that some drunks have broke into your house.

"Tell you what, Mr. Parr. My brother's a deputy sheriff, and he's on night patrol. He always stops here about this time of night and gets him a snack to eat in our kitchen. He'll be along pretty sudden now, an' I'll tell him about them fellers breaking into your house. He'll go over an' arrest 'em all into jail."

"No!" Wallace Parr barked.

"How's that?"

"No! Don't do that! He might get shot!"

"Huh—that's a good one! Not that brother of mine. He carries a gun himself. He'll arrest 'em—"

"How soon do you expect him?"

"He ought to be here within the next half hour."

"Tell him to wait there—for me!"

Parr yelled. "I'll be right out to your place. Tell him to wait there, and we'll go together."

"Well—I dunno. He's a rarin'-to-go deputy. But I'll tell him. I live a half mile down the road toward town from your place."

"Tell him to wait!" Parr implored.

"Tell him to wait for me!"

And he flung down the telephone, peeled off his dressing gown, dived into his vest and coat.

At headquarters, Detective Johnny O'Rourke hung up. Grinning, he asked the switchboard operator:

"How did I sound? Would you have thought I was a farmer named Eb Perkins?"

"Johnny," said the switchboard operator, "you're wasting your time around here. An actor—that's what you ought to be. An actor on the stage."

DS—4E

VII.

Nobody could have guessed that a cordon of fifteen men surrounded the country house which Wallace Parr had bought from Felix McVey. Hidden by bushes and by shadows, their identities had been swallowed by night. And Cliff Shepherd had placed them so that headlights coming along the road and peering into the driveway could never find them.

A two-car garage, its doors closed, was attached to the house. Shepherd had concentrated his firing power within easy range of the paved space in front of the garage. With Halpin and a uniformed man named Rutger, Shepherd crouched amid syringa bushes on the lawn side of the driveway. On the other side, four men were spaced.

Behind the house, ready to cut off a back-door retreat, five men waited; while the remaining three were ambushed near the driveway gate.

So the trap was set, and now for a few minutes Shepherd faced what for him was the greatest ordeal of all—waiting. Inside, he was tense, but his only outward manifestation of nervousness was the way he kept clenching and unclenching his fingers on the submachine gun in his hands.

No rain, thank goodness, dripped from the low skies, but the chill atmosphere was surcharged with moisture, and the sodden ground had clotted his shoes with mud, and his feet were soaked and cold.

He gazed toward the house. Blackness coated its windows, but whether that indicated no light inside or whether heavy curtains prevented light rays from escaping, he could not tell.

The mugs, of course, felt perfectly safe here, so they had stationed no lookout. Luckily! For that would

have brought on shooting before Shepherd was ready for shooting. They would have barricaded themselves inside and fought it out while Wallace Parr was safe in his city apartment.

Shepherd hadn't wanted that. Oh, they could have jailed Parr, but Parr would have hired a battery of attorneys and the case would have dragged through court and you never knew what a jury would do. Parr's defense doubtless would have been that Winterset was the brain-guy after all, and that the mugs had appropriated his country place without his knowledge.

This way was best. Unless—

Well, it was a frightening thought, but it kept skulking through shadows in his brain and taunting him like a giggling hyena—perhaps the mugs were not here at all. Great guns, just to admit such a possibility brought the sweat springing out on his forehead!

He knew that Wallace Parr was guilty, and all logic pointed to the presence of the mugs in this house. But suppose they weren't here. Whew! The news would be bound to leak out about how he had used fifteen men to ambush an empty house. How the newspapers would pour it onto him! And that bad joke about his wearing a uniform again and guarding the squirrels in Taft Park would very likely come true. Civil service wouldn't let them fire him, but it would certainly let them demote him.

Well, he had considered the risk of that, the chance that his calculations were wrong. And he had accepted the responsibility for this sally into the country. He wouldn't pay a dime a dozen for dicks unwilling to risk either reputation or life itself. If his calculations were correct, he would be a great guy, and if

they were sour the public would never understand that he had flouted the easy way of arresting Parr because he had feared that despite all evidence that man would slip free.

Minutes had been passing. Seemed it was time for Parr to come tearing along that road from town. His watch was without a luminous dial and he couldn't risk a light to discover how much time had elapsed. He could hear Inspector Halpin breathing heavily, impatiently; and once the uniformed man Rutger, who had a cold, smothered his mouth in his sleeve to muffle a paroxysm of coughing.

More minutes—or were they only seconds? Jitters danced along Shepherd's nerves like little imps with pitchforks. He tried to forget his nervousness by thinking back over the case; by remembering what a good guy Ed Napier had been and how, there on the stage, Napier had glanced beseechingly at him, expecting him to do something, and yet with understanding in his eyes of the bitter fact that a man could do nothing with a gun loaded with blanks. He would always remember that look on Napier's face, just before he was shot, and he would remember, too, down the rumbling years how brave Helen Napier had been in the Green Room, how she had said, "You're true-blue and you did all you could."

He liked Helen Napier, although not in the way Winterset had suspected; and when he attended Ed Napier's funeral he wanted to be able to hold his jaw up and look anybody in the eye.

Inspector Halpin broke into Shepherd's reverie.

"Listen!" he whispered.

Shepherd strained his ears. Somewhere in a chill puddle the spring's

first frogs were croaking, but through that sound he heard far away the motor of a car. As he listened it grew louder, speeding along the road from the city. Might be a farmer driving home late. Might be a couple out for some petting.

He glimpsed headlights flashing over the shoulder of the hill, and then the car roared into sight, a dark sedan. Brakes squealed and it ripped to a gravel-spraying halt at the gate. Instantly, the door snapped open and a man trotted into the headlight's rays and unlatched the driveway gate. A big portly man with a nose like an eagle's beak.

Back to the car the man trundled. The horn blared. "Shave and a haircut, six bits," it tootled, as the car streaked along the drive and shuddered to a stop at the garage. Once again the horn blared that shave-and-haircut signal. Then the man went puffing toward the front door.

Shepherd imagined rather than saw him punching the bell button.

"Dave! It's Charley," Wallace Parr called.

The door opened. Against the dim light from inside, Shepherd saw Parr's head and shoulders darkly blocked, and the silhouette of another man. Then Parr entered the house. The door remained open a

crack. Shepherd heard the murmur of voices, and he sensed activity.

And then suddenly bulbs flashed on in the garage, and Shepherd heard the rumble of the overhead doors. He saw the long legs of Pete Wainstell coming into sight as the doors rolled up, and inside the garage somebody was already at the wheel of a blue sedan and two other men were skittering toward it. The motor of the car in the garage was already running. But evidently the driver was waiting for Parr's car to move. Standing on the wide concrete in front of the garage, it partially blocked the way to the narrower length of the drive.

The house front door slammed, and Parr was a bulky shadow trotting through the façade shadows. As he emerged into the pool of light yellowing the concrete, Cliff Shepherd called from his screen of bushes:

"Parr! You're under arrest! Put up your hands!"

Parr stiffened as if the end of his tether had yanked him to a halt. He scowled out into the darkness. Then his hand dived into his overcoat and brought forth an automatic. He began firing wildly.

Very foolish.

Shepherd brought up his gun and as he triggered it he heard other

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guns barking from beyond the driveway.

Bullets did odd things to people. Wallace Parr reeled half around on his heel; his gun hand shot out at right angles and his other arm went straight up, so that for a fantastic half second he looked like a fat and over-aged Boy Scout semaphoring.

Then his head hammered downward, so that before he struck the concrete and lay still he looked as if he were trying to do a somersault.

Headlights blazing, the blue sedan knifed out from the garage. Swerving to avoid Parr's sedan, one front wheel bumped over Parr's body and the car rocked. The sedan slithered and squirmed, trying to gain clear passage.

Shepherd viewed all that along the gun barrel. He saw the headlights crash black as a line of bullets struck them; he saw blazes from the sedan; and shooting sounded from everywhere at once. He was shooting, and Halpin and the uniformed man named Rutger, and the boys on the other side of the drive.

Blinded though it was, the sedan screeched in low gear past Parr's car and swaying like a wobbly drunk staggered toward the gate. Its windshield and windows were bullet-riddled, and suddenly it left the drive and plowed into the lawn. The motor choked, died.

Then there was sudden silence. No barking from the car, none from the bushes. And then, weak and mournful from the car, the groan of somebody trying not to die.

Dawn was flooding dishwater-colored light against the windows of Cliff Shepherd's office, and he was very sleepy, suddenly. He pulled down his hat brim, shrugged into his overcoat, ignited the cigarette downslanting from his mouth corner,

paced through the outer office and opened the snap-locked door.

Four men pounced upon him. They had been lurking in the corridor for some time, attempting to gain entrance to his office. They were reporters from the newspapers, and Shepherd brushed them aside.

They barked at his heels as he strode along the marble corridor and down the stair, and they were still yapping at him when he reached the street and crossed to his parked sedan. He slid behind the wheel, slotted the ignition key, and then for the first time he seemed to see them.

"Why, hello, boys," he said. "Did you want something?"

His mouth was unsmiling, but there was humor in his eyes.

They wanted a great deal, it transpired. They wanted information. Nobody else would talk. Everybody else had said, "Ask Shepherd."

"O. K.," Shepherd said, lounging back against the seat. "Get in. Sit down: What do you want to know?"

They wanted to know everything.

And so, while their pencils scratched notes, Shepherd talked. He told about the play called "Murder Is So Jolly," and about the holdup and his futile chase after the bandits. They said yeah, sure, they knew that already.

"We had a couple of clues to play with," Shepherd said, "and they weren't too hot. One was a pocket-knife we found in the box office. By Cressingham's body. He'd evidently used it to cut the phone wire. But the odd thing was that he also had a knife in his pants pocket. We wondered why he'd carry two knives.

"Well, cops are pretty dumb—at least that's what I read in the papers. So it took a long while for it to soak through our heads that Cressingham hadn't carried the knife

he used to cut the phone wire. I figured this escaped con, Dave Kingward, had handed it to him.

"It was a trophy knife. Somebody had won it at the country-club anniversary festival last summer for diving. But the winner's name had never been engraved on it. I checked and found out that Lester Winterset won that event. Winterset was a queer bird, and evidently he hadn't thought enough of the trophy to bother to have his name engraved on it. He was a sort of sneering guy, and maybe he liked to feel he was superior to such stuff as having his name put on the knife.

"I put two and two together and it looked as though the case was cracking open. For Winterset served time in Fort Henry Reformatory. We knew who three of the hoodlums were—none of them had ever been in Fort Henry. But we didn't know who drove their car, and I figured maybe that guy had been in Fort Henry and had got acquainted with Winterset.

"I figured Winterset had needed money and had cased the job for those hoodlums. He knew Mrs. Dwight would be wearing a fortune in rocks. But I figured that at the last minute he lost his nerve and tried to call the whole deal off.

"The way I looked at it, the mugs knew Winterset was the Hindu in the play. So they pulled the job and shot the Hindu—thinking it was Winterset. I thought maybe Kingward had been light-fingered and had stolen the knife sometime when he was at Winterset's talking the deal over. And Kingward left the knife in the box office to let us know that Winterset had been in on the deal so we'd waste a lot of time at Winterset's place while the mugs made their getaway.

"It seemed a little phony—but I

couldn't think of anything else. Being dumb, you know.

"Well, I knew that Winterset wasn't the Hindu. Ed Napier was. But I figured the mugs hadn't realized that the man in Hindu costume was someone else besides Winterset.

"I went out to Winterset's apartment. Found him conked over the head and strangled. That didn't seem the way the mugs would bump him. Of course, they might have. Might have realized they had killed the wrong Hindu and had gone to Winterset's to finish the job. But it didn't seem likely.

"So I began figuring from another angle. Maybe Winterset wasn't in on it at all. Maybe Winterset, who was pretty screwy, really got drunk on the opening night of the play and decided he wouldn't be in it.

"I thought maybe there was a brain guy casing the job who wanted Winterset killed. Maybe the brain guy lined up the mugs to do the job, and their pay would be their haul off Mrs. Dwight. And the brain guy might have given Kingward the knife to plant so it would appear that Winterset had cased the job and then been shot so the mugs wouldn't have to divide up the haul.

"The brain guy would have had to be an insider. Someone who knew all about the play, and that Mrs. Dwight would be wearing her rocks. After the holdup, the brain guy found out that the wrong Hindu had been killed, so he went to Winterset's and killed him.

"I looked over Winterset's apartment and found a duplicate knife. Kind of excited me. And then I thought maybe it wasn't a duplicate at all. Maybe it was the original and the knife in the box office was the duplicate.

"I checked and found the names

of the three men on the country-club anniversary committee. H. Fellows Dwight. Wallace Parr. Emery Ridgeford.

"One of those birds, I figured, could have gone to the jeweler that supplied the trophies and ask that a duplicate be made. They could say that Winterset had lost his trophy and had asked the committee to get him another.

"Well, Ridgeford is a manufacturing jeweler. That's probably why he was on the committee—so he could get the trophies at cost for the club. But I found out that Ridgeford had been wintering in Arizona since fall. That left Parr and Dwight.

"I went through Winterset's *Man About Town* magazines, and I found that from the first issue Dwight and Parr and Ridgeford had all advertised. And I remembered those rumors that Winterset used his magazine as a blackmailing sheet.

"I figured he might have something on Dwight or Parr, and that one or the other had got sick of paying off and had planned his death.

"There was a stack of files beside Winterset's desk. I found he was in the habit of cataloguing everyone he knew. Maybe for future items of gossip in his magazine. And maybe for blackmail.

"I found dope on Ridgeford in that file, but there was nothing on Parr. Then I looked for the 'D' folder, but it was gone.

"Well, Dwight's name begins with D. I thought maybe Dwight had planned the job. His wife's jewels would be insured. And when the wrong Hindu was croaked, Dwight could have gone to Winterset's, killed him, and stolen the 'D' file with whatever information Winterset had on him.

"On the other hand, Parr might

have stolen the sheets out of the 'P' file dealing with him, and then stolen the 'D' file to make it look as though Dwight had done it. But that wasn't what happened.

"I couldn't find much dope on Parr. There was nothing about him in that book, 'Leaders In Tamarack.' That might mean he wasn't sucker enough to pay ten bucks to get into the book or it might mean he didn't want to give out dope about his past.

"Then I had a brain storm. I remembered seeing a file marked 'Carbons' in Winterset's bedroom closet, and I thought he might have kept carbon copies of his gossip about people around town.

"And that's what he did. But it was a funny thing—in the 'P' folder of that carbon file all it said about Parr was a reference to the 'D' folder.

"I yanked out the 'D' carbon folder—and there it was. Parr's real name was Charles Daubman. He used to be a criminal lawyer on the West Coast, and about ten years ago he killed a client and disappeared. Came here and took a new name and started his restaurants. Winterset had all the dope. He wrote it down as it had been told him by a guy he met in Fort Henry who had known Daubman on the coast and who recognized his picture in a Tamarack paper. One of those candid shots that Parr—or Daubman—didn't know was being taken.

"Well, there it was. Winterset had been bleeding Parr. Parr still knew underworld mugs, and he went to Chicago and got in touch with these hoodlums there and planned the thing. We got a statement from Jerry Spensill at the hospital—he drove the bandits' car, and we wounded but didn't kill him.

"Winterset's carbon file also told

how Parr had bought the McVey place in the country. I figured that would be a swell hide-out. And it was. Spensill said they had been living there a week.

"Yesterday afternoon they stole a car. They parked their own car in the Fairview Drive district. Made a quick change during the getaway. Fairview Drive is at the edge of town, just a few miles from Parr's country place. All they had to do was to drive fast to the country and hole in.

"Of course, I checked everything. I checked with Ridgford's jewelry-company manager, and he said Parr was the man who ordered a duplicate knife. I was right on that guess—even though I'm dumb. Parr told him Winterset had lost his trophy knife and wanted very much to get another one.

"Parr was active in the Little Theater. He kept dropping in at rehearsals. So it was a cinch for him to case the job. He was in the audience when the play opened. After the holdup, when he found that the wrong Hindu had been killed, he went to Winterset's and killed him and stole the 'D' file. But he didn't know anything about those carbon copies.

"At headquarters I found we had an old 'wanted' folder filed away on Daubman, and I long-distanced the coast and checked up further. So it was all sewed up. Only I wanted to bag Parr—Daubman—with the mugs. I did that with a fake phone call from a fake farmer who told Parr that some mugs had broken into his country place. The farmer said he'd send his deputy-sheriff brother there right away.

"So Parr hurried out to warn the mugs to beat it. He must have been panicked."

Shepherd drew a long breath and lit another cigarette.

He drew in great mouthfuls of smoke and blasted them out in clouds. He didn't seem to be enjoying the cigarette particularly, it was just something to do. But from the gleams in his tired eyes he was enjoying the respectful attention of the newspapermen. So even newspapermen could be respectful, he thought. Certainly they hadn't shown much respect when circumstances had made him the butt of the police force, of the whole town, in fact. Well, he supposed newspapermen had their moods and their days, just like cops, or anybody else.

One reporter said, "You told us you had two clues to go on. You told us about the pocketknife. Now, about that other clue you mentioned—what was that?"

Shepherd grinned. "Oh, yeah. The other was a couple of paper cups such as candy nests in. I found one in the first getaway car, and the other was in the box office. Guess Kingward had a taste for candy. There was something embossed on the bottom of each cup. Looked like a hammer or a mallet. But we couldn't find any such brand of candy; there just didn't seem to be any such brand as that."

"So—" said the reporter.

"So we were stuck. But when I talked to Clyde Belton—he's Ridgford's jewelry-company manager—he gave me a cigar. Its band had the same thing stamped on it. It wasn't a hammer. It was a tomahawk."

"Tomahawk!"

"Uh-huh. Belton told me that Ridgford had given him a box of those cigars for his birthday. They were cigars made up special for members of the Pioneer Club. Their club emblem is a tomahawk. Ridge-

ford was a member of the Pioneer Club, and so was Parr—I found that out in Winterset's carbon file on Parr, or Daubman. But Winterset had also mentioned in his Ridgeford file something about Dwight being blackballed for membership in that club. Dwight wasn't a member.

"I stopped at the Pioneer Club, to check up. And, hell, boys, there it was staring me in the face. A big tomahawk embossed in stone over the door. I figured that if they made up special cigars they must have special candy made up, too.

"And that was it. After all the fireworks out at Parr's country place, and after we found Mrs. Dwight's jewels on Kingward's dead body, I snooped around inside the house. On the living-room table I found an

empty candy box with 'Special For the Pioneer Club' printed on its lid. Kingward must have had a sweet tooth and Parr kept him supplied with good candy. But Parr didn't think about a tomahawk being stamped on the bottom of each little cup. Nor did Kingward. Kingward must have scooped up a handful of chocolates, paper cups and all, and dropped them into his pocket before starting out on that holdup."

The reporter grinned. "I'd call that a sweet clue," he said with a certain amount of spirit.

"I'll say!" a fellow member of the press put in.

Shepherd grimaced. "Get the hell out of this car," he ordered. "I'm going home for some sleep."

THE END.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

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SECOND- GUESSER

by LUKE SHORT

"You don't believe anything, not even the calendar," Libby told her cynical newspaper friend.

"I don't object to curiosity," the governor said mildly, "until it is sharpened, jabbed in my back and twisted, like yours, Sholes."

There was a murmur of laughter from the Statehouse reporters. It was quick, impatient laughter, however, for they were waiting on what the governor would say next. Over the week end something had happened that turned this Monday-morning press conference into news, hot news. The heads of the AP and UP bureaus were there, nullifying any chance of misquotation. For the city manager of Central City, a hundred miles to the north, could not be found Saturday when it was disclosed that a \$100,000 shortage showed on the city books. And this same city manager was Governor Breathwaite's friend.

It was Murray Sholes who had asked the question. He was the

youngest man in the spacious, heavily-carpeted office, and without seeming to do so, he contrived to carry the irreverence of youth into this relatively holy sanctuary. According to the tradition of the *Mail-Herald*, his employer, he was baiting the Old Man again, and this time with wicked relish.

"O. K., governor," he said, grinning down at the Old Man, for he was sitting on the corner of the broad desk. "The answer. Yes or no?"

"No, I do not know where Jim Linklater is hiding," Governor Breathwaite said quietly. He regarded Sholes with the harried, kindly eyes of a springer spaniel who has been worked too hard.

"You couldn't guess?" Murray gibed.

I couldn't guess.

Another reporter asked, "What

about the city commissioners, governor? What are they doing?"

"They are meeting with me this afternoon."

"As one of the commissioners, didn't you ever look at Linklater's books?" a UP man wanted to know.

The governor shook his head wearily. Some of the shrewdness had gone out of his fighter's eyes. "Boys, I was elected a commissioner as a gesture of good will by my home town. I wasn't active. I have been remiss in my duty."

"Can we quote you on that?"

Murray Sholes grinned at the governor's nod of consent. His lean face was mirthless, his dark eyes were cynical under the sleek black hood of his hair. He was letting the others do the questioning now.

"How about a statement, governor?" the AP man asked.

Governor Breathwaite scowled thoughtfully. As a politician, he knew he should sound a clarion call for good government; for apprehension and prosecution of Linklater; for a thorough investigation. It was expected of him. Well, he wouldn't give it to them, not even if it cost him an election.

He said slowly, "All right, say this, boys: I, personally, and not the party, will make good the embezzlement, because I have been remiss in my duty as commissioner. But on one condition only—that Jim Linklater returns to stand trial in open court, where I will pay for his defense and fight to the last ditch to protect his home and his family from persecution. Say that."

The UP man whistled. "That's dynamite, governor."

"Jim Linklater was my friend," the Old Man said quietly. "If he comes back to take his medicine, I'll stand by him."

There was an immediate movement to the door. In an hour this news would be on the streets of Central City; by nightfall in the homes of every voter. A garage mechanic, his sock feet on the oven door, a bottle of beer by his chair, his wife's talk making it hard for him to read the paper, would come upon this news and think, "Protecting a criminal, huh? The big slob." Or he might say, "Look at this, old woman. That's the kind of guy to have for a friend."

The governor sighed. He was tired, dog-tired. Maybe he had let emotion rule him in this crisis, but emotion or not, he would stick by his word. He was suddenly aware that Murray Sholes was still sitting on the corner of his desk.

"Anything special?" he asked in a tired voice.

Before Murray Sholes could answer, the door opened and a girl put her head in. It was a lovely head, crowned with a torrent of red-gold hair. It was followed by a slim, leggy body in a clinging knit suit of light-blue color. The face, which had been amiable and altogether pretty, changed perceptibly at sight of Murray Sholes. The wide mouth thinned, the warm, brown eyes congealed into a glare. Libby Custer, the governor's secretary, did not like Murray Sholes, and didn't mind showing it.

"Hi, toots," Murray said carelessly.

"For a train-d seal, you're a long ways from water," Libby observed. To the governor she said, "Is this the ambassador from the *Mail-Herald*?"

Sholes drawled, "Yeah. We're going to print his name. We wanted to be sure how to spell it."

Libby ignored him, and the governor smiled gently. Libby said to

the Old Man, "The doctor has just left. Mrs. Breathwaite's condition is very satisfactory, he said. She's sleeping now."

"Thank you, Libby."

"Will you be home for dinner?"

The governor nodded, and Libby departed without so much as a glance at Sholes. He dipped his sleek head to look at his fingernails and then glanced up at Governor Breathwaite."

"Good Old Joe Breathwaite," he murmured. "Everyman's friend. Goes overboard to the tune of a hundred grand to save an embezzling friend." He grinned wryly. "That's a nice touch, governor."

"What's that?" the Old Man said.

"I said it's malarkey." Sholes lounged erect and leaned both hands on the desk. "Governor, how would you like to get blown right out of that chair?"

"With what?" the governor asked mildly.

"With this. The *Mail-Herald* knows that Jim Linklater called on you Friday night and that you loaned him ten thousand dollars. That was your share to help cover his embezzlement. The only trouble was, the story broke before he could milk the rest of your party big shots. How do you like that, governor?"

The Old Man tilted back in his chair. The muscles under his heavy jowls worked a little, and he rubbed his bald head with a hand whose fingers had once been gnarled from hard manual labor.

"So you know that, do you?" he asked gently.

"Yeah. Now tell me where Linklater is."

"I don't know."

"Nuts! You're hiding him. Or he's either in Canada or Mexico by now." His lean face was sneering.

"You'll hide him out, if you can. If he's discovered, you'll refuse to extradite him. Meanwhile, you can sit here and make pious offers to make his embezzlement good—if he faces trial. You know he won't. You'll see to that. Your dough is as safe as a church."

The governor regarded him thoughtfully. "You young fellas are pretty hard-boiled nowadays, son."

"All right. Will you tell me where he is?"

"I don't know, son."

Sholes straightened up and reached for his hat. "You'll find him," he said quietly. "The *Mail-Herald* will give you till two tomorrow to turn him up. We want an exclusive interview with him—no tip-off to the *Chronicle*, mind you—and time to get our paper on the streets before he's arrested. Otherwise, the story about Linklater's mysterious visit to the Mansion will be printed in tomorrow night's paper. No hints, no suggestions as to the reason. We're careful of libel. Just the facts, and let the public guess." He grinned narrowly. "That'll be a tough one to jump, governor, when you declare for a United States senate seat next election."

He put on his hat and was whistling as he went out, a tall, straight figure with a brash and arrogant walk.

The governor closed his eyes and rubbed his palm over his face. He heard the door open, and Libby was standing there, some papers in her hand.

"What did he do to you?" she asked swiftly.

The Old Man told her in a calm voice, without rancor, and as Libby watched him she realized how dead tired he was, how beaten. His wife's illness had taken all the fight out of him, leaving only the gentleness

and tolerance. She felt a hot and unreasoning loyalty for him as he told her of the threat of the *Mail-Herald*.

"Did Linklater really visit you Friday night?" she asked, when he was finished.

He nodded. "He told me he'd lost in a steep poker game."

"How did Murray Sholes find that out?" Libby asked coldly.

The Old Man smiled. "Newspapermen are queer ducks. They're the only breed who can hit without being hit back, Libby." He sat up and reached for the papers in her hand. "What are these?"

"Letters. Sign them."

"Ah, yes." He sat staring at them, not seeing them, and Libby felt a pity for him. He was like a foundering ship, pounding into high seas and, after each successive wave, finding it harder to rise to meet the next one.

He stirred himself presently. "We'd better open an account for you until Ellen is well. I'll do it today."

They had dinner that night, just the two of them, in the high-ceilinged dining room of the Mansion, whose windows looked down from the hill onto the lights of the town. Afterward, the governor went up for an hour with his wife and Libby went into the paneled library.

Her mind was made up—almost. The five hundred dollars was in her purse. It was theft, all right, but with a difference. Presently, with sudden decision, she got her coat and let herself out the side door of the library. The Mansion grounds were spacious and deep in the shadow of the cool night. The lights in Baily's room over the garage told her that the governor's chauffeur was there. He came down and

opened the doors for her, and she backed out her coupé, pausing as she pulled abreast of him.

"If the governor calls to ask if I've taken the car, tell him I've gone to mail some important letters."

She swung into broad Washington Avenue and loafed all the way into the business section. She was trying to recall a ritual she had learned four years ago, Murray Sholes' ritual. Once upon a time, she remembered with a kind of mocking wistfulness, she could have found Murray Sholes at any hour of the day. She knew what he ate for breakfast and how much soda he liked with his bourbon. Part of her own passionate hatred of shame had been acquired from him, just like her distaste for big weddings, bird's-nest hats, omelets and gin. That was the trouble. She learned what he believed, but he would never learn what she believed, and they both knew it and parted. But that was four years ago and she'd done her best to forget that.

But she thought he might be at Barney's. Despite the fact that the *Mail-Herald* put out both morning and evening editions, Murray, as Statehouse reporter, had regular-enough hours, but he stuck around the city room on into the evening, or adjourned to Barney's with some of the newspaper boys to drink too much.

Barney's was in the alley right across from the *Mail-Herald* building. The thrum of the huge presses was in constant counterpoint to the comfortable din of the place.

A woman was no stranger here. There was a mahogany bar against a side wall. Leather-cushioned booths lined two walls. It smelled of cool beer and tobacco smoke. Two pressmen were bellied up to the bar, and a city detective was in confer-

ence with a cab driver in one of the booths.

Libby took a booth, ordered cigarettes and a beer and settled herself to wait. She didn't have long. Murray Shoes came in a little after nine, alone, and he'd been drinking, Libby saw. He wore a trench coat, the belt of which trailed on the floor, and he looked mussed, all except his hair.

It was a full five minutes before he looked in the bar mirror and saw her. He turned and stared at her, and then picked up his beer and came over. His lean face was mocking, good-natured.

"Would you be looking for me?" he asked.

"I wouldn't want to be quoted," Libby said coldly, "but I was. Sit down."

He did, putting his beer on the table. "A bribe offer," he murmured. "I can smell it."

"It must take a lot of practice to be that good."

Murray laughed. "All right. How much for what?"

"Nothing for nothing," Libby said. "I didn't come to bribe you, and the governor doesn't know I'm here. I came on my own prompting."

"To plead for the life of your darling?"

"You'd call it that," Libby said, her voice pushing into anger. She leaned forward suddenly. "Murray, be honest. What's got into you? Why is it that you hate the Old Man so?"

"The *Mail-Herald* policy," Murray said. He turned around and called for a highball, then faced her again. "Outside of that, I don't hate him. He's just another politician."

"But he isn't!" Libby said hotly. "He's a friendly, lovable old boy."

Murray grinned. "So's W. C. Fields. Only he's funny."

Libby leaned back against the leather, her eyes speculative, defeated. The highball came and Murray drank.

"You haven't changed, have you?" Libby said presently. "You bite every nickel you get, and hope it's lead. You don't believe anything, not even the calendar." She paused, catching Murray's mocking nod. "Don't you believe anything, Murray?"

"Anything of politicians, sure."

"But why politicians? Aren't they people?"

Murray rubbed his mouth with the back of his hand and regarded her. He was about to say something and changed his mind, then leaned forward to draw unsteady circles with the ring of water his glass left on the table. He was getting serious, now, and Libby's heart quickened.

"They're chiselers, rats, grafters, liars, double-crossers and thieves—to a man," he said calmly. "I've dedicated my life to proving that they eat their young. All I lack is pictures."

"But the Old Man isn't like that!"

Murray looked up swiftly, and with the violence of a man who has had too much to drink, said, "He isn't? He's bogged downright now in the scabbiest trick of all—hiding a swindler!"

"You're drunk and loud, Murray," Libby said quietly.

Murray looked about him, caught the bartender's grin and waved. Turning to Libby, he said, "All right, I'm drunk and loud. Sorry."

"I want to talk to you—seriously," Libby said. "My car's outside. Why don't you ride around with me and get some air, and then we'll be able to talk?"

Murray shrugged. "O. K.—only the answer is no."

Libby got up and Murray paid the

check, and they went out to the car. Libby made certain that both windows were shut and the heater on. Murray didn't even notice.

Libby didn't talk as she moved out of the downtown traffic, working her way toward the river road. Murray was hunkered down in the seat, hands in his pockets, and he began to nod.

"Isn't it hot in here?" he asked once.

"I'm freezing," Libby said promptly.

By the time she had passed the last hamburger stand on the outskirts of town, Murray was asleep. His head swiveled from side to side at each bump; his chin was on his chest. Libby slowed down then, discovering that her palms were wet and her heart was hammering. Now that she was faced with it, it wasn't so easy. In fact, in the cold light of reason, it was a silly form of suicide. But the governor's phrase, spoken at the dinner table, kept floating to the top of her mind: "No, they have a peculiar form of immunity."

They did, did they?

She speeded up until she came to the place. It was a curve with a low guard rail. The grade on the outside of the curve sloped gently to field level, maybe twelve feet below. She turned the spotlight on it, swinging to the outside of the curve for a glance in passing. Maybe it wouldn't be so bad.

Half a mile above it, she found a place to turn around and she stopped the car. Murray still slept. She raced the engine, absurdly hoping that its noise would cover what she was about to do. She reached in Murray's inside coat pocket and found his wallet. In it, she placed the governor's five hundred dollars, and put the wallet back. That done,

she took a look at her gas gauge, saw it registered almost empty, and then threw the car in gear.

Approaching the curve, panic seized her for a moment, and then vanished. She hoped she was thinking of everything. Sliding over against Murray, she put her right



arm about his neck, guiding with her left hand.

As the white guard rails loomed up, she gunned the motor with her left foot, then switched off the ignition. Sudden silence descended, with only the tires singing. A car was coming, its lights not yet on her.

She tensed herself, counted five more guard rails, then yanked hard on the wheel, at the same time holding Murray tight to her, and pushing on the floorboard.

The coupé met the cable with a terrific impact which almost stopped the car. Libby heard a shrill screech of rubber on metal, the boom of the post as it gave way, and then the car bucked off the ground. It landed on the slope, settled gently on its

side, and because the top was round, it went clear over.

Libby had control of everything until it landed on all four, and then she lost her toehold, so that when it settled gently on its side and stayed there, she slid down the seat, Murray's dead weight shoving her.

Something rapped her head and she didn't even remember it hurting.

When she next opened her eyes, it was to gaze at the white ceiling of the emergency room at Mercy Hospital. Nearby, two blue-uniformed State cops were talking with an in-



Now that she was faced with it, Libby found it wasn't so easy; in the cold light of reason, it would be suicide.

tern, all three smoking.

Libby sat up, and the talk ceased.

"Where's Murray?" Libby asked quickly.

"Plastered," one of the cops said wryly. He dropped his cigarette and came over to her. "Now what happened?"

"Where is he?" Libby asked.

The cop pointed to the table behind her. Murray was stretched out on it, smoking a cigarette. He looked at her and winked.

"Who was driving?" the cop asked. "He won't talk—yet."

"I've got to talk to him," Libby

said desperately. "Just give me a minute." She looked over at the intern. "Isn't there any place we can be alone?"

"That hall out there," the intern said.

"Get your story fixed up, sister," the cop said grimly.

Libby slid off the table and said to Murray, "Come on." They went through the swing doors and down the hall. When they had gone far enough, the cop called, "That's all right, right there."

Libby swung around to face Murray. "Are you hurt?"

"No. What happened?"

All the concern flooded out of Libby's face as she sighed. She smoothed her dress and then looked up at Murray. "What's going to happen, you mean," she said acidly. "Look in your wallet."

Murray stared at her, then reached in his pocket and brought out his wallet. He whistled at the sight of the bills, and his eyes were wary as he looked up at Libby.

"Catch on?" she asked sweetly.

"Not yet."

"You were driving the car. You were drunk. That money in there was to bribe information out of me about the governor. You've wrecked my car and you've injured me internally about fifty-thousand-dollars' worth." When Murray made a sudden gesture, she backed off and held up both hands and said loudly, "Now don't try to give me that again!"

"Shhhh!" Murray hissed. "Listen. Come back here!"

Libby took a step toward him. There was the light of the devil in her eyes. The cop looked undecided about coming over to them.

Murray said in a venomous whisper, "He might hear you."

"That's what I hope."

Murray looked down at the wallet

and then raised his glance to her. His eyes were sultry. "Frame-up, eh? You can't get away with it."

Libby only smiled. "Want to find out?" She held out a leg. "They're rather nice legs, Murray, the kind a jury likes. And I'm not exactly ugly. And I can lie with the straightest face. And, oh, I'm terribly hurt internally. And you, you great big drunken tramp, you tried to hit me because I wouldn't take your bribe money. That's what wrecked us." She paused, smiling a little. "How would it sound to a jury, darling?"

"Pretty phony."

"Would it? Let's see how the cop likes it." She wheeled and started down the corridor. Murray grabbed her arm and roughly swung her around.

"You'll ruin me!" he moaned.

"Yes. Won't the *Chronicle* boys just eat it up!"

"But listen to reason!"

"I'm deaf. I don't hear good," Libby mocked.

Murray's face became sober. "What is it you want?"

"Call off the dogs on the Old Man, Murray. That's all."

Murray looked at her a long time. "I believe you mean that," he murmured.

"I do."

"You risked your neck and mine in a wreck, you smashed up your car, you stole five hundred bucks to plant on me, and you're willing to perjure yourself in court—all for the governor. Is that right?" Murray asked slowly, as if he was trying to believe it but not succeeding at all.

"That's right," Libby said. "You wouldn't understand, of course, just why. You still think he's just a politician."

Murray was still looking at her.

He scrubbed his jaw with the palm of his hand, his eyes probing, puzzled.

"You mean, you'd do all that for him?" Murray said again, wanting to be sure.

"More than that."

Murray shook his head. "It looks like I've been wrong, then. I've known you a long time, Libby. You aren't a wrong-guesser. You aren't even a guesser."

"Don't be gracious," Libby said coolly. "What's it going to be, Murray?"

For answer, he took her arm and led her up to the cop. "Miss Custer was driving, sarge. I was wall-eyed and she was taking me out for air. She lost control of the car. That's not an offense, is it?"

The cop looked at him and said heavily, "I'm sorry to say it isn't."

Murray took out the wallet and dug out a large bill, his own. "That isn't a bribe. It's just gratitude. Split it with your pal."

The cop took their names and they left. Outside, Murray hailed a taxi and settled back in the seat.

"This puts you on the spot with

paper, doesn't it?" Libby asked presently.

Murray nodded. "They know blackmail. I'll explain how it is."

"Has it ever occurred to you to ask the Old Man for help, instead of baiting him?" Libby asked. "Why don't we go up and ask him to help us find Linklater?"

"Why don't we? I'm learning," Murray said humbly.

Libby had a key to the house, and she switched on the lights in the hall as they entered. A crack of light showed under the library door. Murray followed her down the hall, paused by her as she knocked, and entered after her.

The governor was seated in his deep chair, facing the fire. Across from him sat another man, and Murray Sholes blinked twice before his eyes came to dead focus on this man. He was middle-aged, impeccably dressed, and his lean, intelligent face held lines of worry. It was James Linklater, embezzler.

"Come in," the governor said courteously. He saw Murray and rose and shook hands.

Libby's first emotion at sight of

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Linklater was one of vast and shaking relief. And then, when she thought of Murray, her heart dropped right down to her knees. She waited for him to make some sneering wisecrack about the governor only needing a little pressure to turn up the embezzler.

But strangely enough, Murray said no such thing. He kept quiet, waiting on the governor's introductions. When the Old Man bid them be seated and they were, he said to Murray, "Well, son, it looks like the impossible has happened."

Murray only nodded. The Old Man said to Jim, "I didn't tell you about this, did I, Jim? The *Mail-Herald* knew of your visit Friday night. They promised to print it, inferring I was trying to protect you, if I didn't turn you in by tomorrow, giving them an exclusive story beforehand." He gestured with both hands. "Since I didn't know where you were, your visit is doubly welcome."

Murray said, "By the way, Mr. Linklater, where were you?"

Linklater looked questioning at the governor, and the Old Man nodded. "This is the time, Jim."

Linklater turned tired eyes on Murray. "In a tourist camp outside of town, here. I . . . I lost my head when I saw the Saturday papers. I had intended to borrow money from my old friends here, giving the excuse of a gambling debt. You see, I only needed thirty thousand to make good."

"But it's a hundred thousand that's missing," Murray pointed out.

Linklater nodded. "I have seventy thousand of that money in bonds, in my own name. I needed only the time to cash the bonds and scrape thirty thousand together. I didn't get it, and, as I say, I lost my head."

Murray leaned forward, his lean face attentive, curious. "And what made you come here tonight?"

Linklater's gaze shuttled to the Old Man. He looked at him a long moment, and almost smiled. Then he turned to Murray. "I read your *Mail-Herald* tonight. The first thing I saw was Joe's offer to make good my embezzlement if I would stand trial: I . . . I—Joe's my friend." He looked straight into Murray's eyes. "I tried to repay that friendship in the only decent way I knew how." He said more quietly. "I am a thief, perhaps, but not an ungrateful one."

The governor said, "Jim, you're tired." He rose and pulled the bell-cord. Linklater shook hands with Murray and when Sam, the colored butler, came, he and the governor went out. Libby could hear them talking at the foot of the stairs.

Murray was standing in the middle of the room, staring thoughtfully at the door. He turned to regard Libby with the same thoughtful expression. "I didn't know anybody but the original Rover Boys ever did that."

"Just a couple of shoddy politicians," Libby murmured.

"Not so shoddy," Murray answered, and shook his head.

The governor came back in then and Murray said, "Is he giving himself up, governor?"

"Immediately after your paper is on the streets," the Old Man said. "That was the bargain, I believe."

Murray stepped out to the phone in the hall. He talked a long time, while both Libby and the governor stared into the fire. They didn't need to talk.

Murray came back in and said, "The boss would like to speak to you, governor. He's on the wire

now." He added, with a show of spirit, "If he makes one crack out of line, I'll tear his heart out. Will you talk to him?"

The governor said he would and went out, leaving Murray and Libby alone. Murray walked across the room and stopped in front of her chair. He looked down at her, and saw a very tired girl with a blue bruise on her right temple.

"Do you think the governor could use a bright young man who be-

lieves in him when he runs for senator next year? Maybe a campaign manager?"

"I think so," Libby answered.

"Do you think you could?"

"I'm not running for senator."

"No. I mean, could you use a bright young man who believes in you?"

Libby watched him from soft eyes. "I could give him a trial," she said.

Murray nodded gravely. "That's all he wants."

THE END.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

CROSS SECTIONS OF THE GREAT METROPOLIS

You'll find them in the short novel featured in next month's Detective Story. You'll meet the fashionable set, the men who get around, who wear dinner clothes and mess jackets and tails; the women who wear orchids and ermine wraps. But you'll meet another layer of society, too, in this many-faceted story. The vague figures in rooming houses. Folks who frequent the shabbier bars. And you'll meet plenty of cops, and one hard-boiled dick in particular.

All limned on one great canvas in

"DEATH PICKS THE UNKNOWN BLONDE"

by Roger Torrey

Detective Story Magazine for June.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

EVER



GREEN

by ODGERS T. GURNEE

*Even the hypocritical St. John Luke
Matthew found he had a heart.*

St. John Luke Matthew gazed across the somber beauty of the Covenant Memorial with the rapt expression, begotten of myopia, which endeared him to the bereaved. And looking, even so vaguely, he must have found it good, for the curl of complacency quirked the edges of his smiling lips and he strode with benign air and unhurried steps into the severely white-and-green stuccoed lodge which bore upon its outer door in chastely etched brass, the word "Superintendent."

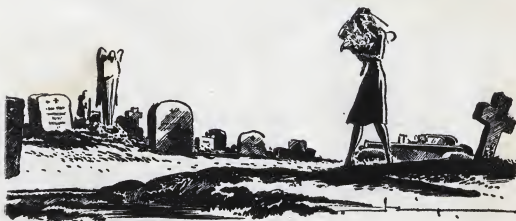
It wasn't a large cemetery, the Covenant Memorial. But by virtue of the fact tht it embraced all creeds, and lay midway along the Boston Post Road between the scattered colonies of artists, playwrights, actors and their like, it had done well by the man with the sainted name. Artists, playwrights, actors

and their like had wealthy friends.

The sound of an approaching motor broke the stillness. Matthew lifted a fringe of dimity curtain and blinked in near-sighted concentration as he strove to identify the oncoming car.

"Rolls," he whispered suddenly and dropped the curtain, running to the door. But when it opened, he came slowly across the threshold, head slightly bowed, hands folded one upon the other across the front of his frock coat, a rapt expression glowing in his China-blue eyes.

The long, purple limousine had halted in the drive and a tall woman, sheathed in black, was descending from the thick velvet luxury of the tonneau. She was, or had been, beautiful. And she wore at her waist a cluster of three mauve-and-purple orchids. These things Matthew saw



and catalogued without seeming to see anything at all.

The woman faced him from the crushed-slate drive.

"David Ashley?" she asked. "He is here?"

The beatitude of Matthew's smile answered her.

"Come with me," he said gently.

They cut off across the rolling pathway past the graves. The seams of earth between the sod slabs still showed like stitches crisscrossing the mound where he halted. Square granite blocks mounted guard at head and foot.

"The League stone hasn't come yet," he said apologetically. He looked at her slantwise. "There haven't been many out—to see him." She caught her breath sharply and dropped to her knees. Matthew stepped back.

"Davie," she said. "Oh, Davie! Why didn't they let me know in time?"

Her hands fluttered across the mound and came to rest at her side, crushing the orchids. She drew the pin and held them out, cradling them in her hands. Then she laid them carefully against the swelling green-brown mold.

Her fingers caressed the stems and the palm of one hand pressed against the heart of the mound for an instant. Then she rose swiftly, gracefully, like a spiral of smoke from a spent fire. Her eyes halted at the earth stains on the hem of her skirt, disregarded them, and rose to meet the beneficent calm of Matthew's smile.

"I was his star," she said wistfully. Her voice grew fuller, richer. "I interpreted him." A pause. "And I loved him."

She went quickly down the curving pathway.

Matthew watched the purple

limousine pur away and vanish. Then he lifted the orchids carefully and hurried to the lodge. In a closet behind his desk he opened a refrigerator door. Red roses made a blanket of color on the top shelf. Below them little pots held out clusters of other tones. He filled an earthenware vase with water and made room for the orchids.

He went then, to look carefully from the front window at the entrance gates, before taking up the telephone.

"Hello," he said guardedly when the answer came. "Central Florists? . . . Joe? This is Mattie. Get the boy over here sure this afternoon. Yeah. Good hunting, son. Listen!" His eyes scanned the windows and his voice lowered. "Roses and orchids."

The clatter of another car sounded from outside. He hung up the receiver quickly and went to the door. It was a taxicab.

The woman who stepped to the driveway was small, assured. Her eyes were red-brown, her hair golden. She still was pretty.

"I wish to see David Ashley's grave," she said.

"Come with me," Matthew answered gently.

She stepped ahead of him as they reached the sod-scarred mound. Her eyes traveled the length of it.

"You should plant grass seed," she said.

The beatitude of Matthew's smile reached out to her. "The League's stone is to be set this week," he said. "Then we shall do everything to make it beautiful."

She nodded, pursing her lips. "I want something—" She motioned quickly with a tanned hand.

"Flowers?" he suggested. "We have no greenhouse here, but I keep a few blooms on hand—roses, per-

haps? And I have some lovely orchids."

"Oh, no, no." She cut him off abruptly. Her eyes fluttered across the mold, and she sighed.

"Nothing so perishable as that," she whispered. "Something that will last forever; something"—her voice rippled unexpectedly—"evergreens! Two of them. One on either side of his head, like everlasting candle flame."

"I will be glad to arrange it," Matthew assured her.

Matthew's smile was very gentle.

"I think it can be done, completely, for twelve dollars."

She frowned at that. "I should think ten dollars would be ample."

"I will see that it is done for ten dollars."

"Good," she answered quickly, rummaging in her purse. Then: "Can you change a twenty-dollar bill?"

He bowed low, veiling his eyes. "If you will come to the office," he said.

She paused with one foot on the running board of the cab, counting the change.

"Thank you," she said crisply. Then her eyes fluttered again. "I was his wife," she said. "I transcribed all his manuscript." The clear high voice rose triumphantly. "I interpreted him." A pause. "And he adored me."

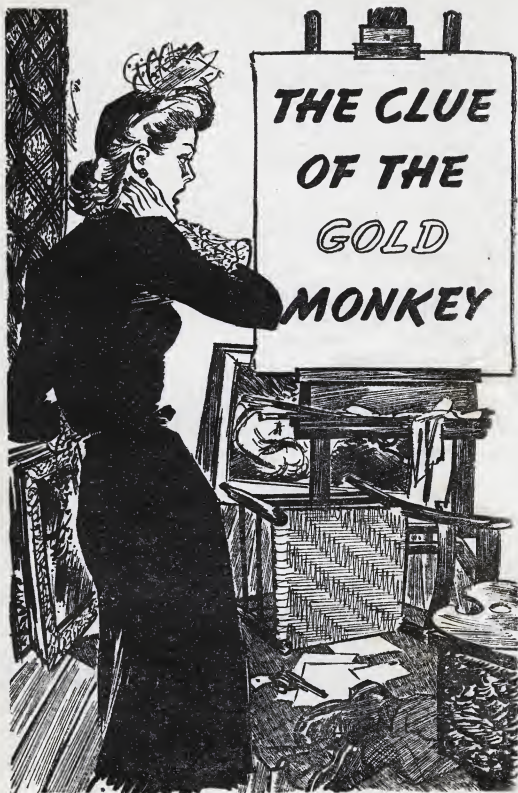
Matthew shifted the telephone. "Joe?" he asked. "Mattie talking. When the boy comes, send along a couple of little evergreens. Yeah. I don't care how little. Just so I can plant them. That's right. And Joe, listen—nothing doing on the orchids."

His gaze turned toward the window, the rapt expression begotten of myopia glowing in his China-blue eyes. The voice at the other end of the wire rose in expostulation. He shut it off.

"Nothing doing, Joe. I've got my reasons. The orchids stay here—this fellow's got one break coming to him."

THE END.





A Novelette

by JESSIE REYNOLDS

Barth Whittaker set out to solve a murder case before he knew the cards were all stacked against him.



I.

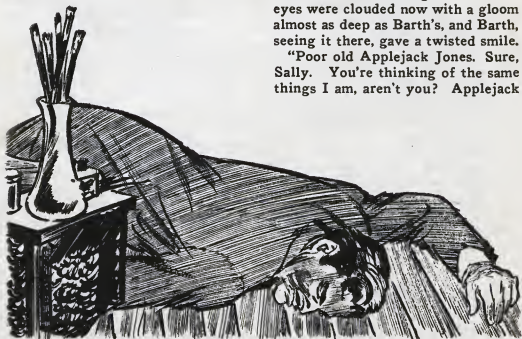
Bartholomew Whittaker, the tan of his draft service as fresh on his lean face as the gilt of the "Attorney At Law" that lettered his office window, sat tipped precariously backward in his chair, his long legs braced against his desk, and stared gloomily at the girl rustling the leaves of her notebook before him.

Ordinarily, it would have been hard for anyone, and particularly for Barth, to stare gloomily at Sally

Grey. Brown hair and soft gray eyes and a wide mouth, quick to laughter and quicker to gentle sympathy, had made Sally Grey something more than the quietly efficient, twenty-two-year-old court reporter of whom Arlington County was justly proud.

More than one nervous, tortured witness in the big chair of the old courtroom across the square had turned to meet her steady eyes as she waited for a stumbling answer, and found courage in them. And sometimes, even shame. A shame that had changed more than one lie to truth, and altered more than one verdict in its making. But those eyes were clouded now with a gloom almost as deep as Barth's, and Barth, seeing it there, gave a twisted smile.

"Poor old Applejack Jones. Sure, Sally. You're thinking of the same things I am, aren't you? Applejack



is as much a part of Arlington as the courthouse over there, or the jail where he's slept off his harmless drunks for a good fifty of his seventy years.

"You're wondering who's going to dig Arlington's gardens this spring and wash Arlington's windows. And who'll keep the bend in the river clean so the kids'll have a decent place to swim, and umpire their ball games in Sulzer's pasture.

"Remember how he nearly lost his life dragging my blind old setter out of the quicksand in the quarry pit? Applejack wasn't a drunken old soak to me then. He was darn' near God."

"And how he took care of mom's furnace that winter after dad died and wouldn't take anything for it because he knew mom hadn't it to pay?" There were tears in Sally's eyes and she smudged them out with the back of her hand. "Trying to think of him as a murderer, Barth—it doesn't make sense. It's crazy. I don't think in all Applejack's life he ever hurt a living thing but himself. That he'd wait seventy years, and then kill Phil Andrews in cold blood over a measly little thing like being jailed for stealing a couple of automobile tires that turned out weren't stolen at all—"

"Remember, he says he didn't kill him," Barth continued softly. "It's Sid Cole who says he did. Cole's got Applejack in the chair already, and watching him burn. Another feather in his cap—another conviction to chalk up against the 'second-term-for-prosecutor' campaign this fall. And the thing that gets me down is the way the poor old guy trusts me. Thinks I can pull a 'not guilty' out of my sleeve like a conjurer does a rabbit. I wish it was that easy."

Barth sighed. "Say, do me a favor, Sally, will you? Follow with those

notes you took at the coroner's inquest, and check up on me while I run over the story as Applejack gave it to me. If I'd been here when it happened, instead of taking my bars—

"Oh, well, here's Applejack's story as he gave it to me, and I'll make it short and snappy. If I seem a little biased when I touch on Phil Andrews, forgive it. That guy's grandpappy was a hard-headed, two-fisted old gent who made his money turning out coaches and hearses and wagon wheels. He had hair on his chest and, if legend speaks true, a vocabulary that would have shamed a leather-necked corporal. Wonder what he'd have said if he could have seen the last scion of the family he'd founded, wasting his winters in New York, painting out of drawing nudes that no one ever buys, and strutting his summers around Arlington in a Vandyke and a beret!"

Sally's lips twitched into a smile. "Give the devil his due, Barth. The beret was fetching and the Vandyke had an air and, take it all in all, Phil was a pretty big toad in a little puddle here in Arlington—to a lot of people."

"Yeah, to a lot of would-be sophisticates, like that young wife of Dan Mathews, and the cocktail-drinking crowd she plays with. And to little fool kids like Amy Biddle, who think they know all the answers, and aren't dry behind the ears.

"I hear she had a pretty bad case on him last summer, while her folks were taking that South Sea Island trip. I was at camp then, and wouldn't know. But if she did, she sure got over it. Saw Gar Little yesterday, and he tells me they're announcing their engagement soon. No, to me, Phil Andrews was a fake and four-flusher. I'm weeping no

tears because he's dead. All I want is to prove that Applejack didn't kill him. And now that I've got that out of my system—

"This is Applejack's story as he says he gave it to the coroner's jury. The story he'll give to the grand jury when it convenes, and to the trial jury later—and it damns him from start to finish.

"Comes April, and the robins and Philip as per usual, smocks, berets, canvases and paints. He stirs his housekeeper, Aunt Liz Barclay, out of her winter's sleep, cleans his studio garage, and sets himself for his summer's swanking. He finds the fence around his two-acre lot in bad shape, and calls in Applejack to build a new one. A bang-up job that's to net Applejack forty bucks in coin of the realm. More money than the old coot had seen in one lump in that many years. Applejack does the work. I saw the fence, and it's a honey. The day it was finished and Applejack all set to get his pay, Andrews swears out a warrant and had him clapped into the jug for stealing two tires from the part of the studio that's still a garage.

"Twenty-four hours afterward, Aunt Liz, hunting for a garden hose she'd piled away the fall before, finds said tires, carefully covered with a blanket, and buried beneath a pile of canvases that Phil had brought back from New York with him, and calls Sheriff Olson and tells him so.

"I'm not saying Phil was framing Applejack to get out of paying him for his work, and what I think doesn't matter. The thing is Applejack thought so, and wasn't a bit backward about saying so. In fact, he said a lot of things about what he was going to do to the double-crossing, stuck-up city so-and-so, who'd play a trick like that on him. According to Applejack though, he

never said he was going to kill him, and Cole didn't bring anyone in who said he had."

Sally shook her head. "He didn't. Applejack did all his talking in Pete Murry's tavern. Went straight there from the jail. Here's Pete's testimony." And her fingers that had been busy flipping the pages of her notebook found what she wanted and creased it back. She read:

"The old guy came over and I gave him his supper and a drink or two on the house. There was the regular crowd hanging around, and he had himself a time telling about the lousy trick he claimed Andrews had played on him. Come ten or so, with the guys ribbing him about what he's going to do, and he comes out and tells 'em. He says he's going over there and collect them forty bucks he had coming, if he had to yank that beard off Andrews' pasty face to do it, and that when Barth Whittaker came back from getting his law papers, he was going to have him sue Phil Andrews for chucking him in jail. He said Barth was a friend of his, and he wasn't going to stand for any cheap city sport putting tricks over on him."

Barth laughed, but there wasn't any mirth on it. "There you have it," he said soberly. "Stealing or a murder charge—leave it to Barth. But that checks up with what he told me, even to the time he left Pete's place, ten o'clock. Let's take it from there.

"What with Applejack's legs being a little wobbly and the Andrews house on top of Cemetery Hill the way it is, it must have taken him a good half hour to reach it. There was a light in the front room, so he knew someone was up. He rapped on the door till his knuckles hurt. No answer. He was getting ready to bang again, when he heard what

sounded like a couple of backfires from the alley, and—"

Sally had been leafing over her notebook again. "Listen—I'll read it. I've got it right here just as Applejack gave it." She read:

"I figure that's Phil coming in from some of his gallivanting—no tellin' how long he'll putter around that studio of his. And what with Liz probably sleeping on her one good ear, no use my pounding here no more, so I ducks around back. The shades was down, but one of them was skewgee and I could see the light behind it. I goes up to the door and has my hand on the knob ready to push it open, when I hears a noise. I knowed it was a woman crying, but it was the scariest kind of crying I ever heard. Like a sick cat mewing. It made me crawl. I wanted my forty bucks, but I didn't want it bad enough to bust in there—not then. I hid behind that lilac bush next the door, and waited. Don't know how long—might have been five minutes, might have been ten—couldn't been much before I heard the door that goes out from the studio into the garage at the back bang open, and the sound of feet running down the alley. I thought, 'Well, whoever it is, she's gone.' And I went in.

"Sure, I knew he was dead when I seen him. Any guy with one bullet through his heart and another through his head would be dead. He was lying sprawled across that fancy rug he's got on the floor, and there was a gun beside him—his. I knowed it the minute I seen it—that pearl-handled gun he kept in the top drawer of his desk to shoot rats with. I—"

Sally stopped long enough to let Barth give vent to a groan. "The blab-mouthed old idiot! The confounded simple-minded fool! Knew

about the gun. Knew where it was kept. And boasting about it! Go on, don't let me stop you, Sally. I'm in pain, that's all. But it will pass."

"I'm not so sure," Sally said grimly. "Get this—and then you will groan!" She read:

"I picked it up and it had blood on it. It made me sick, so I put it down again. That's when I saw his wallet. It had spilled out of his pocket when he fell, I guess. I knowed he had money in it—nigh to a hundred dollars; I'd seen him counting it that morning. I opened it up, and there was two twenty-dollar bills right on top. I took them. They was mine. He owed them to me, and I knowed if I didn't get them then, probably never would. And then I begun thinking it wouldn't look so hot—me being caught there and all—and I started out.

"That was when I run into the constable and the sheriff. Either my banging on the front door or them shots I'd thought was backfiring had woke Liz, and she'd got scared and called the police.

"I may be a ornery, drunken old nobody, but I didn't kill Phil Andrews, and you ain't going to make me say I did, Phil Cole! I spanked your pants for you when you was a red-nosed little bully, beating up on kids smaller than you. You ain't changed a mite. I'm too old to spank them now, but Barth Whittaker'll do it for me. And if you don't believe me when I tell you there was some woman in that garage with Phil Andrews when he was shot, Barth will. And he'll find out who it was, too!"

"For Pete's sake, stop! I can't take it any more!" Barth's groans had turned into moans, and his hands were clutching his hair. "Sure I'll find the dame—sure! I'll put an

ad in the *Arlington Daily*. 'Would the woman who was mewing like a cat in the Andrews garage the night Philip Andrews was murdered, kindly step forward. Reward—a peck of trouble.' That's the only way I'll ever get her. Phil had thrown a cocktail party the day before he was killed, to celebrate that daub he'd just finished of Lana Mathews. Aunt Liz had cleaned up, of course—things like cigarette butts and glasses and such, but when Olson went over the place the next morning after they'd heard Applejack's story, he says he could have hung half the society dames in Arlington on the fingerprints he found. And he didn't find another damn thing but fingerprints. And his own wife's and Sid Cole's wife's were among them, or could have been, if he'd traced 'em down.

"I'm asking you, Sally, if a woman was in that studio and bumped Phil off, is she playing the game according to Hoyle?

"Where's the cigarette butt with the lipstick on it she should have left. Where's the fragment of dress that should have been caught in the door, or the strand of golden hair twined in the dead man's fingers? Oh, I'm not being funny, Sally. I'm just licked. I want a lead to follow, a clue to work on, and I haven't any. And I don't know how I'm going to get one."

Barth had been so lost in his worries that he hadn't heard the heavy footsteps on the creaking stairs, nor the hesitant, timid fumbling at the office door. Sally had. And, as the fat shawled and bonneted figure wheezed into the room, it was her startled: "It's Aunt Liz, Barth! It's Liz Barclay!" that brought Barth's feet from his desk with a bang, and his chair into a right-about, dizzy whirling.

Lizzie Barclay had been as much a part of Arlington as Applejack Jones, and for almost as many years. Her husband had been a wheelwright in the old Andrews factory, and at his death she had gone into the Andrews home as housekeeper and stayed there ever since—thirty-five of her sixty-nine years. In a way, it was her home. A clause in the will of Philip's father had forbidden its sale as long as she lived, and established a small trust fund to maintain it, that lapsed at her death.

She was a kindly, good-natured, small-town woman, strong in her church and respected in the town. Barth had known her all his life, and he had never known her worried or troubled. She looked both to him now. And he thought, "Poor old soul—I suppose Phil was almost like her own, and she's taking his death hard!" and he said cordially:

"Aunt Liz! Glad to see you. Those stairs must have been a climb for you. Here's a chair for you. Sit down, and Sally will get you some water."

Sally got the water and Aunt Liz drank it, her cotton-gloved fingers shaking.

"It ain't only the stairs," she puffed. "It's—well, mebbe it's because I'm just a mite scared. Scared of what I've come to do. There's things harder for my old feet to carry round than pounds, and heavier. Worry. Something is worrying me, Barth. It's been worrying me ever since the night Philip . . . got himself killed. I ain't breathed a word about it to nobody, but I just couldn't stand it no more, and I've come to you."

She was carrying an old black reticule with cross-stitch embroidery on its faded sides and a silver clasp worn to the satiny softness of an age-old silver spoon.

Her fingers fumbled at the fastening, and Sally, seeing how she hesitated, gathered up her notebook, and started for the door, but Aunt Liz motioned her back.

"I got something here I hadn't figured on showing no one but Barth, but seeing you're here, Sally, I'd kind o' like you to stay. You're a Grey, and the Greys have close mouths. And then you're a friend of Amy Biddle's. It'll kind o' keep me from feeling so sneaking—what I'm going to do."

Barth's eyes flew to Sally's to meet the same shocked and fearful questioning mirrored there. He had asked for some clue to work from—some lead, no matter how small, to the woman Applejack had heard crying in Phil's studio. Surely he wasn't going to find it in pretty, headstrong, harum-scarum Amy Biddle! Lord help him, he hoped not!

The bag was open at last and Aunt Liz's hand came out of its depths to put a small gold ornament in Barth's outstretched hand. The delicately wrought figure of a tiny, grinning monkey dangling from a gold bar carved into the semblance of a bamboo pole.

II.

Sally gave a choked cry, and Aunt Lizzie nodded somberly.

"Yes, it's Amy's pin," she wheezed. "That little gold monkey pin her ma brought back to her from the Philip-pines, not four weeks ago. I knowed it because Mrs. Biddle had it at the missionary meeting where she talked on her trip, and told us about the people who made it.

"I found that pin in Philip's painting studio the night he was murdered, after the sheriff and the constable had took him away. They'd told me not to touch anything, but

I jest couldn't go off and leave that ugly mess of blood on the rug. Philip was squeamish about blood. It made him sick. From the time he was a little fellow no higher'n a grasshopper, he'd gag and throw up, just seeing it. And I kept thinking of him dead, and asking me to clean it away, and I got a pail of water and a rag—and . . . and there it was. All stained and red, so I didn't even know it was there until the water had washed it clean. Like's not I done the wrong thing—not turning it over to the sheriff, or Sid Cole. But I jest couldn't, somehow. With Caleb Biddle head of the Reform League, and Sid Cole tied up with Dan Mathews' and his crowd, I knowed how glad he'd be to make trouble for Amy.

"Amy's a nice girl. But she's young and spoiled, and her folks have left her alone too much this last year. If they'd been home she wouldn't chased Philip like she did last summer. Her pa wouldn't had it. Times when I came near taking her over my knee and walloping her myself.

"Philip's dead. I ain't one to slander the dead. But he wasn't no man for a young girl like Amy Biddle to traipse after. It's my opinion, if Amy's grandma Biddle had died last spring instead of this one, leaving her that hundred and fifty thousand dollars the way she did, that Philip wouldn't 'a' got sick of her phoning him and chasing him the way she did, and gone back to New York a month earlier than he meant to. He'd stayed right on and married her. Philip wanted money, and he never did like to work for it. Amy felt pretty bad over that. I found her out in the garage one day, crying like she wanted to die. I was glad when she went away to visit them friends of hers out West. Fair took

the heart out of me thinking of her over there in that big house with nothing but servants around.

"When she come back this spring and took up with Gar Little again, I thought she'd come to her senses and everything was fine. Seems like I thought wrong. Not that she's hung round Phil since he come back from New York, or called, or anything like that the way she used to. It's worse. Nights—late. Twicet I've seen her with my own eyes, sneaking round the back of the house, and him out in that studio of his, waiting for her."

"It might have been one of those times she lost the pin," Barth offered gently, against the trouble in her eyes. "Perhaps she lost it that afternoon before he was killed. He gave a party that day to show Lana Mathews' picture, remember. Lana and Amy are friends. She was probably there. That must have been when she lost it."

Lizzie Barclay's voice was old and tired, but its blunt "It wa'n't," held old Applejack's unwavering stubbornness. "The women made a mess that took me from half-past three Wednesday, till close to supper time to clean up. And then it wa'n't clean through. I went back after I got my dishes done, and worked for most half an hour finishing up.

"If that pin o' Amy's had been there then, I'd 'a' found it, and I wouldn't be climbing no office stairs today to tell you about it. I'd 'a' called Mrs. Biddle, and told her it was there and to have Amy drop by and pick it up. I wouldn't be telling it at all, if my conscience wa'n't riding me so. Or if my room had been in front o' the house instead of back, and I'd heard Applejack knocking while that shooting was going on in the garage. I'd 'a' come forward and said I'd heard him, and he

couldn't 'a' shot Philip, because he couldn't 'a' been in two places at once. But I can't swear he knocked a knock. It was the shots that waked me up and scared me so I rung up Sheriff Olson.

"Applejack Jones is a drunken old coot, but he's a human being and he's got his right to the life the Lord gave him. Seems to me, Barth, a smart young boy like you be, ought to know some way to find out who's guilty and who ain't, without smirching people's names more'n you have to. And Amy—she's so awful young!"

"I'll do the best I can—you know that, Aunt Lizzie," Barth said, and walked to the street with her. When he came back Sally was waiting for him just inside the office door. Her cheeks were flushed, and excitement was crowding her words.

"Barth! I've been trying to think of something ever since Aunt Liz showed us that pin. I just remembered. Phil was killed five days ago, wasn't he? It was Wednesday night. Amy's got an alibi for that night, and a good one. She spent it in the city, and Lana Mathews was with her. They drove up in Amy's car. Left town about half-past two. I saw them just as they were starting. Lana was in the rental library returning a book, Amy was in the car and I stood there talking until Lana came out. Amy was wearing a navy-blue suit with that gold monkey pinned on the collar, and I remember thinking how clever it was. How it made what might have been just another suit into something smart and unusual.

"She said Dan Mathews was out of town and wouldn't be in until the next day, so they were making a night of it. Going to stay at a hotel, and come back the next morning when they felt like it. She had

some shopping to do and Lana had a dress fitting, and they were going to meet at eight o'clock, and see whatever show they could get tickets for.

"If that's true—and you could easily check on it—Amy couldn't have been in Phil's studio at half-past ten that night when he was killed!"

"But her pin was," Barth said softly. "And don't forget it's only a forty-five-mile drive each way, and with Amy handling that car of hers, you could count an hour out for the round trip, and still play safe. She didn't have to see the play through, you know. Or she could have played sick, and not gone at all. Let Lana go alone, and come back here, and still been in her bed at the hotel, when Lana got there.

"Sally, just how serious was that affair with Phil Andrews last summer? What's the low-down on it? How much was gossip and how much truth? Could Phil have had something on Amy that she didn't want Gar Little to find out? I'm twenty-nine. Phil Andrews was at least eight years older. Amy was . . . twenty?"

"Twenty-one this spring when she came into that money of hers. And I hate to say it Barth, but Aunt Liz was right. Amy made an awful fool of herself. Her people were away—it was the first time she'd ever been absolutely on her own. Gar had gone straight from college into an officers' training camp—there wasn't a soul around to check on her. There was plenty of talk. But I think you're biased on Phil Andrews, Barth. As far as his morals with a woman are concerned, I wouldn't trust him any further than you would. But what you're talking about is blackmail. And you're talking about a man who is dead and

can't defend himself. Phil's father left him plenty of money. He wasn't that hard up. He couldn't have been. It makes me just as sick to think he could do a thing like that as it does to think Amy could have shot him.

"There's only one decent thing to do. That's to show that pin to Amy, tell her where it was found and see if she can't explain things. Suppose I have her over to my house tonight, and you can drop in. It's mom's night working at the church supper, and there won't be a soul around but ourselves. It's what Aunt Liz would want you to do. If I were Amy, it's what I'd want you to do."

"You aren't Amy, thank God!" Barth said with fervor. "But maybe you've got something there. Make your plans and give me a ring at the house. I think now I'll amble over to the bank before it closes and have a talk with Amos Peters. He handles the Andrews estate. I'd like to see how big a dent son Philip has put in it, if I can."

Barth was closeted with Amos Peters, president of the Arlington State & Trust, for less than half an hour. But it was long enough to bring a grim line to his mouth and a sober look to his eyes. The grimness and the soberness weren't lightened any by his talk with Amy that evening.

Sally's ring got him at the dinner table. "She'll run in—about seven, she says. But she can't stay more than fifteen or twenty minutes. Has a date with Gar. And, Barth, this thing is up to you. I can't break the ground for you. I haven't the heart."

And Sally hadn't. Barth knew that as soon as he saw Amy. She was sitting, curled like a spoiled kitten, against the cushions of a huge chintz chair. Her dark hair framed the childish oval of a face that

seemed hardly large enough to hold the huge eyes and the vivid scarlet mouth that smiled her careless greeting.

"Hi, Barth! Sally didn't tell me she expected callers. Mind if I finish my cigarette before I make myself scarce?"

Barth thought: "I'm nuts! A kid like that couldn't kill a man! How in God's name am I going to start this? What am I going to say?" His hands were clammy and his eyes went to Sally's for help. Seeing none there, he started it the only way he knew, bluntly and truthfully.

"You don't have to make yourself scarce, Amy. It happens to be you I came to see. Sally thought you'd rather it would be here than at my office or your home.

"Phil Andrews was murdered, Amy. They say Applejack did it. He says he didn't. He says there was a woman in Phil's studio that night after those shots were fired. That he heard her crying. Heard her run away, before he went in and found Phil dead.

"I wanted to see you, because I've got something that belongs to you. Aunt Liz found it on the rug in Phil's studio, the night he was killed, and right after they took him away. I am asking you how it came there. And I'm giving you a break when I do it. It's a break Sid Cole wouldn't give you, if he ever got his hands on this, Amy." And, taking the gold monkey pin from his pocket, he dangled it before her.

From the dusk behind the curtained windows a night bird called. A large white moth fluttered helplessly about the shaded lamp, and through the stillness that had fallen like a suddenly dropped curtain over the softly lighted room, Barth heard Amy's drawn-in breath, that something deep inside her seemed to have

caught and held. And he thought: "Oh, my Lord! That's the way hysterics begin!" And braced himself for the storm.

There wasn't any storm. A long, close second, and Amy was uncurling her feet, putting them softly on the floor, snubbing out her cigarette in the ash tray beside her, and turning her big black eyes on Barth.

It was only in her voice, thin as a tightly-strung thread, that Barth could feel the panic that was in her, and his skin pricking to it.

"So—I'm the one who killed Phil, am I? Not Applejack Jones any more, but Amy Biddle. And you're giving me a break? Thanks for nothing, Barth. Sure that's my pin—I'm not trying to deny it. I knew I'd lost it, but I didn't know where. The last time I wore it was the Tuesday before Phil was killed. I was in Phil's studio with the rest of the mob he had in to see Lana Mathews' picture. I suppose I lost it there, if that's where Liz says she found it. Any one but that old dodo would have known that, and given it to me and kept her mouth shut. But not her! Liz Barclay is a nosy, evil-minded busybody, and she's always had it in for me. Thinks I'm a lost lamb that she's got to shoo back into the fold. You're a swell friend, Sally Grey! Asking me over here, pretending you wanted to show me a new dress, and then framing a thing like this on me! You put Barth up to it. It's a woman's trick—not a nan's. I'm getting out of this dump, and I'm never speaking to you again as long as I live. And you give me my property, Barth Whittaker! Give it to me, do you hear!"

Her red-tipped fingers snatched futilely at Barth's closed fist, and Barth said, refusing to meet Sally's stricken eyes:

"Not so fast, Amy. I'm sorry, but

that explanation of yours doesn't hold water. I gave you your chance and you muffed it. You say you lost that pin the day before Philip died. You didn't, you see, because the day Philip was killed you drove in to Cleveland, and you were wearing it then, on the collar of a dark-blue suit. You forgot that you saw Sally and talked with her while you were sitting in your car waiting for Lana. You're not a good liar, Amy. A good liar remembers things like that."

Amy stared at him. Barth could see her teeth, a sharp white line between lips thinned to a crimson scar. "She might not have killed Phil Andrews," he told himself, "but if looks could kill, I'd be in my death throes now!" and said quietly, "Well?" and waited.

Amy was on her feet, her slender

shoulders squared, her small hands knotted into tight-clenched fists. Her eyes swung from Barth to Sally, from Sally to Barth. Her lips curled.

"And a good liar can make up things like that, too, Barth Whitaker. Don't forget that! There aren't any wings on Sally Grey. She's out after her man the same as any girl, and helping him to win his first case wouldn't hurt her chances any.

"The night Phil was killed, I was in Cleveland with Lana Mathews. Ask her and she'll tell you so, and she'll tell you I wasn't wearing my monkey pin, either.

"Go ahead, check up on me. I should care. But remember, while you're doing it, that I'm not the only woman Phil Andrews ever played around with. Not by a damn sight. Now let me out of here! You make me sick, both of you!"

The door banged, and Barth, looking at Sally's flushed face, grinned.

"Where's your sense of humor, Sally? You're not letting that get under your hide, are you? Nice little gal, our Amy. And just what did she mean by that last crack of hers? Wasn't trying to shift the buck to Lana Mathews, was she? Ever hear anything about Lana and Andrews?"

"Nothing except that Dan didn't take much to the portrait-painting idea." Sally was trying to smile, but the smile wasn't coming very easily. "I don't think you'll get very far on that angle, Barth. Lana is Dan Mathews' second wife, and he's twenty years older than she is, and those piggy eyes of his are never off her. She wouldn't dare carry on an affair with another man under his nose, and Phil Andrews wouldn't dare let her. I'm scared, Barth—for Amy. If she'd lie about that pin, she'd lie about the rest of it. What



are you going to do? Talk to Lana?"

"Sure," Barth said wearily. "It's all I can do. But I'll let it ride until morning. Not much use now,

anyway. Amy's probably on the 'phone already, fixing it up with Lana so their stories will jibe. I won't get any help there."

Barth was wrong. He got plenty of help. Too much, it seemed to him, and offered too willingly. But it didn't come from Lana Mathews. It came from her husband, Dan.

III.

Dan Mathews' father had run the saloon in the Park Hotel, across from the courthouse. Dan had heard a lot of politics, loafing around the



"Something is worrying me, Barth," Aunt Liz said. "It's been worrying me ever since the night Philip . . . got himself killed. I just couldn't stand it no longer so I've come to you."

bar, and liked the sound. He had listened, and learned and schemed. Played along with the little men, played up to the big ones. Lucky breaks, the right parties in power, and he had shot up like a back-yard weed. Boss Dan Mathews—a name in the State. A name to cater and toady to. A new bridge needed, a new highway to be built, government help on a new water system. "Go to Dan, he'll get it for us." And he did.

The other things he got—graft, concessions from the slot machines and bookie houses that operated full tilt in Arlington County, and the counties roundabout—well, let Caleb Biddle and his Reform League care for that. Not much use trying to pin anything on a guy as smart as Dan Mathews! Always a laugh for everyone, Dan had—and a joke and cigars to pass around.

If his narrowed, close-set eyes never picked up his easy laughter, few noticed. And if the laughter never went deeper than the coarse, heavy lips that framed it, few noticed that, either. He laughed and back-slapped his way through the town and the country around, his hat on the back of his head, his diamonds flashing, arrogant, sure of himself and of his following.

By rights, Barth should have been one of that following. Their politics were the same. That he wasn't—there was a reason for that. It went back a good many years. It went back to a frightened, white-faced boy in knee pants, hiding behind a lumber pile in the back of Dan Mathews' big brick house, and watching the master of that house beat and kick to death a dog that had angered him.

Barth had been gagging and sick when he crept away. He never had told what he had seen. He never had forgotten it. He was thinking

of it again and seeing it again, as Dan Mathews breezed genially into the office, his hand out. And it wasn't an accident on Barth's part that had sent a sheaf of papers scattering to the floor. By the time he could gather them up, Mathews was lighting one of his big black cigars, and the hand wasn't outstretched any more.

"Nice little place you got here, Whittaker. You played it wise, starting out in your own town. Arlington's going places. No reason why you shouldn't go along with it. You're tied up with the right party. But that isn't what I came to say. Me—when I've got something on my chest I want to get rid of, I get rid of it. And I don't waste any time coming to the point. By rights this isn't my affair. It's Lana's. But she's sick—the flu. Been in bed for four days now. And this isn't helping her any. She's all broke up over the thing. It's about Amy Biddle.

"I don't know just what's behind all this, and my wife doesn't, either. Amy didn't say. All I know is, she called Lana up last night round half-past seven or eight, and said you'd be coming to see her to ask her whether she'd been wearing that monkey pin of hers last Wednesday when the two of them went into the city together, and that she was to say either 'Yes' or that she didn't remember. And if you asked her whether they were together all the evening, she was to say 'yes' to that, too.

"Lana was in bed when Amy called her, and she took the call on her bed phone. I was sitting beside her. I heard part of it and Lana told me the rest, and asked me what was the right thing to do. She and Lana are friends, you know, and Lana's fond of the kid, and didn't want to hurt her.

"I told her no matter who it hurt,

when it came to a choice between the truth and a lie, to stick to the truth; that that was the way I played the game, and I'd want my wife to do the same."

Barth's eyes said: "And that's the biggest lie you ever told, Dan Matthews!" But his lips said: "It's the only safe way, all right. A liar always gets caught in the end. And—what is the truth. I'd like to know."

Dan had caught the look in Barth's eyes, and his own had narrowed against it. But Barth was busy with his cigarette, his face blank and expressionless, and Dan shrugged off his suspicions and told his story. Or, rather, Lana's.

Except that Amy had been wearing her pin, there wasn't much difference between Lana's story and Amy's—up until the time for the theater in the evening. They had reached the city around half past three or a quarter to four, registered at their hotel, garaged the car, and parted for their errands. They had dinner together at seven and went up to their room to dress for the theater.

"Lana says Amy was short and snappy; had a grouch on about something, all through dinner, and after they got off the elevator claimed she had a headache and was going to stay in her room, instead. Lana told her she hadn't come to town just to mope around in a hotel room, so she went alone. Saw some play or other—forgot what she said it was—had a couple of cocktails in the hotel lounge, watched the people for a while, and about twelve went up to bed. Amy wasn't there. Lana thought she'd given her a run-around, and was good and sore, and stayed awake to tell her so. But she says when she came in half an hour or so afterward, the poor kid looked

so like the wrath of God, she didn't have the heart. She says her shoes were covered with dust, and her eyes were swollen shut with crying. She pretended she was asleep, so Amy wouldn't know she'd seen her. Says Amy cried half the night. They didn't even come home together. Lana left Amy asleep, and got the local down. I'd got in the night before, earlier than I'd expected to, and was home when she came. She didn't tell me a darn thing. Loyal—you know how girls are. Just said that she'd caught a cold, and felt miserable, and the trip had been a flop. And when she heard what had happened to Andrews the night before, and began putting two and two together—

"Well, she's been laid up ever since, and I've a hunch that's what ails her. Worry about what Amy was up to that night. She knew a lot more about that affair Amy had with Andrews last summer than she's ever told—even to me. Oh, well, there's the truth of it."

He hesitated for an instant, snapped the end off a fresh cigar, lit it, and when he spoke again, his voice held an oily smoothness, and his thick-lipped smile the smugness of a cat at a saucer of cream.

"I'm not asking any questions, Barth. But I'm not exactly dumb. Applejack says he heard a woman in Andrews' studio just after those shots were fired—and you're Applejack's lawyer.

"Naturally, I'd hate to see Amy mixed up in the mess, but if she is, I guess Caleb Biddle will have to take it. Sort of a joke on the old sourpuss and his Reform League—a stink like that plumped on his own doorstep.

Well, so long. I'll be seeing you. Of course, you understand my wife is sick, and can't be worried, but

she'll be where you can reach her any time it's necessary and you can count on me. I'll give you all the help I can."

"I'll bet you will if it means making Caleb Biddle squirm," Barth said to himself, and sat for a long time after Mathews had left, trying to piece the puzzle together.

It hadn't been much over ten when Mathews had left Barth's office. It was almost one when Barth got Sally on the phone. But, by that time, Amy Biddle had been closeted with him for an hour and more. She had come in answer to his blunt: "Your cover-up didn't go through, Amy. Lana let you down. I'm talking to you—either here at my office or at your home. Take your choice."

She had entered his door, sullen, defiant. Young. There was neither sullenness nor defiance nor youth in her when Barth left her there and walked across the square to find Sally.

Court had adjourned for the week end, and Judge Barton had cleaned up his calendar, made his assignments for coming trials, and gone home to his book-filled library in the big old house in Chestnut Street.

Dust motes danced in the stale air of the empty courtroom, but Barth could hear the *clack-clack* of Sally's typewriter coming from her little cubby-holed office in the rear, and felt easier knowing she was there. He needed her for what was ahead—and so did Amy. Needed her steadiness, her saneness, her honesty and courage.

"Lana let Amy down," he said soberly. "Dan Mathews came in this morning and spilled the beans. Talked a lot of hooey about hating to get the kid in wrong, but he'd advised Lana to play the game as he always did—tell the truth, no matter

how it hurt! Nuts to him. He'd give his soul—if he's got one—to spill Phil Andrews' murder into Caleb Biddle's lap. I got Amy up to the office. She's there now—what's left of her. She gave me the lowdown on Phil Andrews, and I'm apologizing to the first skunk I see for calling him one.

"Amy was in Phil's studio the night he was murdered. But she still claims she didn't kill him. She thinks Lana did. She wants me to drive her to the city this afternoon, and take you along. She wants you, Sally.

"Go ahead—get your things cleared off and your hat and coat, and I'll give you the story. It's an ugly story. It'll make you as sick as it does me.

"I asked you, if you remember, if you thought Phil could have had anything on her. He had plenty. She'd had a child, about four weeks before her folks came home this spring. His.

"Oh, don't waste that look now, Sally! The worst is still to come. Remember Aunt Liz said he got tired of her chasing him, and went back to New York earlier than usual last year. He went back because he knew she was in a mess, and he wasn't having any of it. Amy says she knew he was sick of her; that there was some other woman he wanted, but she was so crazy about him she didn't care. And when she was sure about the baby, she was crazy. She says she wrote and telephoned, but he wasn't in New York at all; that he was somewhere up in Maine, and he hadn't left any forwarding address.

"She stuck it out as long as she dared, and when she couldn't stick it out any more, she went on that trip—'west.' 'West' was out on the west side of the city. She had her baby there, in some fly-by-night hos-

pital, under another name. One of the nurses told her about a woman, a little ways out in the country, who'd take the baby and board it, treat it decently, and wouldn't ask questions, and as soon as it was born, and Amy could walk, she took it there.

"It's been there ever since. Amy goes up herself, once a month, pays its board, sees it's all right, and no one ever knows—that is, no one but Andrews. Like the poor little fool she was, she'd written him once again. A crazy, young-girl letter, while she was in the hospital, and after the baby was born. Telling him what had happened, and how she hated him for it, and hoped he'd rot in hell. He'd probably heard, by then, about that hundred and fifty thousand dollars that Amy's grandmother had left her, and was kicking himself all over the map because he hadn't married her the summer before. I didn't tell you, did I, that he was busted higher than a kite? I found that out from the bank. Amy had played right into his hands with her letter.

"He came back here this spring, found her here, trying to pick her life up again and get a little pleasure out of it, and started in with his plain and fancy blackmail. Not money marriage. He didn't want a few thousand out of that fortune of hers, he wanted the whole damn thing, and he had Amy where he could get it.

"Knowing the Biddles, all he'd have to do would be to show them that letter of Amy's and tell them he was sorry the thing had happened. That he loved Amy, and had come back to make a clean breast of it, and do the right thing by her. Shame, disgrace, Amy with an illegitimate child! They'd have kicked up the dust to the first preacher!

"Amy'd got her lesson by that time. She loved Gar Little—even thinking of being married to a heel like Andrews made her want to die. She didn't dare tell Gar the truth and face the music, and she was afraid to run away, for fear Phil would go to her folks with the truth and they'd yank her back. She did the only thing she could think of to do—let things ride, hoping and praying that Phil would break down and give her back her letter, or she could get him off guard sometime and steal it."

"And that was what she was doing in his studio the night he was killed," Sally said breathlessly, "But why that night, Barth? What made her try it then?"

"Because she'd just got her first break." Barth laughed a little, but there wasn't any mirth behind it. "That was the day she found out that Lana Mathews was the dame who'd busted up her romance the summer before. That while she'd been having that baby, Lana had been up in the Main woods on a premature honeymoon with Andrews, and laying her plans for a Reno divorce from Dan.

"Philip had put the soft pedal on them since he came back to town this spring, and Lana was so upset and scared that she spilled it all to Amy.

"Amy says she and Lana had been such close friends that at first all she could think of was making her see just what sort of heel Phil was. It wasn't until she told her all about how he was trying to blackmail her into marrying him, so he could get hold of her money, and Lana had called her a dirty lying so-and-such, and locked herself in the bathroom so Amy couldn't smack her back, that it dawned on Amy what a swell club Lana had handed her. Why, Lana had even told her the fishing village

where she and Phil had 'honey-mooned.' If Dan Mathews ever got wind of that—she wouldn't have to warn Phil what would happen to him then. He'd know.

"Andrews was giving her her letter now—on a silver platter. And she couldn't wait to get it. And she didn't. She left Lana bawling in the bathroom, grabbed her hat and her jacket, got her car out of the garage, and beat it."

"And I suppose he refused to give it to her, tried to choke her or something, and she killed him with his own gun," Sally said, her face white. "Well, I don't blame her. And no jury will."

Barth shook his head. "You're going too fast, Sally. If Amy's story is true, you're wrong—on both counts. She says it was about a quarter after eight when she left the city—about nine when she got to his place. She drove by the house, saw a light in the studio, and parked her car out at the end of the alley and went in through the garage. There's a door leading from the garage into the part that Phil made into a studio. Amy says that was open, and she could see Phil sitting alone, with a paper in his hand, at that old desk his grandfather made. She was beginning to be pretty scared by that time, and shaking, so she huddled down in the shadow of Phil's car, to wait a minute and get back her nerve. That was when she recognized the paper he was reading. Her letter. But before she could make up her mind what to do or say first, he was turning a little carved ornament in one of the front panels of the desk. She says a little drawer popped out, and he stuck the letter in it, pushed it back again, and went out of the studio and up toward the house,

whistling and chuckling to himself.

"She hardly waited for him to get out of hearing before she was in there, had that hidden drawer out again, had her letter, and was beating it down the alley to where her car was parked, and—straight back to town. She had left her monkey pin in Phil's studio, but she says she hadn't even known it was gone, until I showed it to her yesterday. And I believe her—for she made a stop on the way back to the city. She stopped at the house of that woman who had kept her baby. The baby was dead. It had died the week before, of spinal meningitis. The woman didn't know Amy's name from Adam. Had no way of reaching her. She'd done the best she could—had it buried as the child of her niece, had the doctor's certificate to show. Amy said it knocked her cold. She fainted, and had a pretty bad time. When she could get out again, it was midnight. She thought at first she'd drive back home, tell her folks the truth, and take her medicine. And she didn't have what it took. So she went back to the hotel. Lana was there and Amy thought she was asleep. She got into bed, trying not to waken her. And by and by she cried herself to sleep. When she wakened in the morning, Lana had gone.

"And there you have it, Sally. If Applejack's story is true, there was a woman in Andrews' garage at half past ten—and after he was killed; if Amy's is, it wasn't she, because, at a quarter of ten, she was at the farmhouse where her baby was being boarded, and didn't leave until midnight.

"If the woman checks that, Amy's got a chance. If she doesn't—well, it's all over for Amy but the shouting, and I don't mind telling you that

I feel like hell. Amy was in Phil's studio the night he was killed, she had every reason for killing him, and she could have done it, and to keep my faith with Applejack, I'll have to turn her in. They won't send her to the chair, but between Dan Mathews and his puppet-on-a-string, Sid Cole, she'll wish they had.

"Ready? O. K.—let's get going. We're driving up to the farmhouse, you and Amy and I. She wants it that way."

IV.

Crossing the street, Barth stopped at the drugstore for sandwiches and a carton of milk. Sally had lunched, but neither he nor Amy had, and Amy was in no condition to face that drive, and what it might mean on an empty stomach.

Amy was just as Barth had left her, huddled in a chair, her eyes burned-out holes in a paper-white face. She turned to Sally with a pitiful, childish trust that brought a lump to Barth's throat, sobbing her, "I didn't kill him, Sally! I didn't! I didn't!" even through the food she choked obediently down.

Barth had his car at the curb below the office. As soon as Amy had eaten, and drunk her milk, they started. As they pulled away from the curb, Barth saw Dan Mathews. He was cutting across the square from the courthouse, and turned, his eyes narrowed to stare, and Barth pushed his foot hard on the gas. He wanted no talk with Dan Mathews then.

It was two when they left Arlington, with a drizzle as fine as fog in the air. It was quarter of three, and the drizzle had turned into a down-pour, when, at Amy's directing, they swung off the Pike about ten miles outside the city and drove down a

muddy, little-used lane to a small, bleak farmhouse, set back in a pine-dreary yard.

"Her name's Spencer," Amy said miserably. "Mrs. Spencer. I'm just Mary Smith to her, like I was to the folks at the hospital. I paid her fifty dollars a month out of my allowance—and after I got my own money, I made it seventy-five. It was a fortune to her, and she wasn't a bad woman—she was neat and clean, and good to the baby. The baby was a boy, Sally—he . . . he looked just like Phil. And . . . I . . . I couldn't bear to touch him! But I was his mother, and I wouldn't have left him there if he hadn't been treated well. You know that, don't you? You know I'm not . . . that wicked? It was awful, when I knew it had died like that. I . . . I felt as though I'd murdered it! And the woman was so frightened—she was afraid I'd get her into trouble.

"Maybe you'd better stay out in the car, and let me talk to her alone. She might not like it seeing people with me."

"Sorry, Amy." Barth's eyes held a sober reminder. "I don't want to make things any harder for you than they are, but you tried to pull a fast one with Lana, and I'm not taking any chances here. I'll stay in the car, but Sally will have to go with you."

They weren't gone very long. Sally shook her head as they climbed into the car. Her face was very sober. But a change had come over Amy. Anger had given her courage. Her small chin was out, color had come back to her cheeks, and her eyes were flashing.

"She looked me in the face and lied! She said she'd never seen me in all her life before. She said I was

crazy, and if I didn't get out of her yard, she'd turn her dog loose on me. I'm not scared any more. I'm mad! Every word I've told you about what happened that night Phil was murdered is true. If Applejack heard some woman in there at half past ten, it could have been Lana Mathews, just as well as me, couldn't it? I tell you she was crazy about Phil, and what I told her had got her wild. If you'd seen her face when she struck me, and the way she looked when she banged that bathroom door on me! She knew I was telling the truth, and she was hating Phil Andrews then, as much as she was me. She wasn't sitting down and taking a double cross like that—not Lana! I know her too well.

"And Lana's sly—smart—she had to be to put it over on Dan Mathews the way she's been doing. She could have gone to a show long enough to get her ticket stub, and left, couldn't she? She could have driven back to Arlington as well as I did. She could drive!"

"But she didn't have a car," Sally said. "She came up with you. And there aren't any trains that could have taken her down and brought her back by twelve. She—"

Amy's voice was like a whip, picking up Sally's words and cracking them. "She could have rented a car, couldn't she? She's got a driver's license, and she always carries a wad of bills. Why, there are two places not three blocks from the hotel—I remember passing them. If you don't want to help me check them, I'll do it myself. I'll hire detectives! I'll—"

"Oh, we'll help you," Barth broke in wearily. "We've gone this far. We won't let you down now. But even granting you're right, Amy, and

that Lana did go back to Arlington that night, killing mad, and ready to have it out with Phil, hiring a car isn't such an easy thing. You don't just walk into a rent-a-car garage, say 'I want a car,' and drive out with it. Those places keep records. They're open to the police. You've got to have your driver's license with you, and proof it's yours. You've got to leave your name and address. A woman mad enough and desperate to have murder in her heart would be too smart to leave a wide-open trail like that behind her."

"She could lie, couldn't she?" Amy cried fiercely. "Know what I'd have done that night, if I hadn't had my own car? I wouldn't have wanted anyone to know I'd gone back to Arlington, either, and I'd have found some place where they weren't so careful, where money talks. I'd have asked a porter at the hotel where there was a place like that. They know that sort of thing—and sell it for a price. Suppose there aren't dozens of women on the loose, asking them how to do undercover, sneaking things all the time? That's what I'd have done, and Lana is as wise as I am—wiser."

"I'll bet if I go into that hotel now, and try, I could get a bellhop or a porter to tell me a place—and I bet it'd be the same one Lana went to."

"If she went to one," Barth's voice was dry. "But you can try if you want to. It can't do any harm."

They drove to the hotel and stopped a little down from its awninged entrance. It was still pouring, and early twilight was beginning to add its gloom. Amy wasn't noticing, either, or caring. She was out of the car almost before the wheels had stopped turning, and run-

ning down the sidewalk. Barth's eyes followed her.

"Got to hand it to the kid. If this is all a bluff, it's a darn good one."

Sally said: "It isn't a bluff, Bart. At least the part about that woman and her baby wasn't bluff. No girl is making up a thing like that on herself. Take that from me. It's this part about Lana Mathews that's worrying me. If Dan ever hears you were trying to drag his wife into this, you'll never get another case in Arlington County."

"That's a bridge we'll cross when we come to it," Bart said grimly, and settled himself to wait.

Fifteen minutes. Twenty minutes. Half an hour! And then, Amy. The rain was dripping from her hat brim, her shoes were soaked, but there was triumph in her eyes.

"It's in the alley, right back of the hotel," she said breathlessly. "A man by the name of Jake runs it. I got it from a bellhop. It cost ten dollars, but it was worth fifty. And I got a check cashed, too. Plenty of money—it's in my purse if you need it."

They found the place easily enough. A shabby building of unpainted boards, a cluttered parking lot, a few idle cars. And, in the open doorway of the garage, a ratty-eyed man in greasy overalls, watching a big blue sedan, as it swung out and headed east, away from Barth's approaching car.

Both Barth and Amy had their eyes fixed on the man in the door. The sedan had been just another sedan to them. It was Sally who really noticed it and stiffened. "Barth! That car that just came out—it was Lana Mathews! I know it was! I've never seen another

gray-blue like it. It was a special color—she had it mixed to order. Quick! There at the end of the alley—"

Barth was busy with his wheel. He couldn't look too closely, but Amy's eyes had caught it just as it left the alley for the street, and she was crying beneath her breath.

"It was Lana's car! It was. She's been here! She's paid the man to keep still! Oh, I didn't tell you, Barth—I was ashamed to tell you—but when you went over after Sally, I called Lana. I was so mad, I had to. I told her she was trying to pin Phil's murder on me, and she wasn't going to do it. I told her she had killed him; that she'd come back here that night when I was out, and I was going to find out how she'd done it. And now we're too late! We—"

"You've sure talked yourself into a hell of a hole," Barth snapped. "Now for God's sake, shut up and let me handle it," and swung into the garage, out of the rain.

The man came forward with a smirk at the girls and a knowing wink at Barth. "Want to make that threesome a twosome and rent a car, buddy? O. K.—you've come to the right place."

Amy had been fumbling with her purse, and Barth could feel her fingers on his, and the crinkle of a bill.

He glanced at it and whistled. A century note—no piker about Amy! And, waving it carelessly back and forth where the man could see it, he said:

"Last week—Wednesday, April tenth, to be exact—a woman got a car from you. She rented it somewhere around nine in the evening, drove it ninety miles, and had it back here around twelve. She was alone. She was a good looker, and

she wasn't broke. You wouldn't remember something about it, would you? Something your records might prove?"

The man's eyes were on the bill. They were cautious, but they were greedy, and there was no mistaking the regret in his voice. It was real.

"Sorry, buddy, but you're five minutes too late, and if that's a hundred bucks you're flashing there, I've lost fifty on the deal. There's been a run on those records for Wednesday night, and I've parted with them. But if you want to take a chance and hand that bill over, I've got some dope that might be worth it."

When Barth's car backed out of the garage a few minutes later, the three people in it knew that Lana had hired a car the night of Phil's murder, that she had driven it just far enough to get her to Arlington and back, and that she had been at Jake's place not five minutes ahead of them, and bought the only written records that could prove it. She probably thought she had bought the man's silence, too. That had been her mistake.

Amy was shaking all over, excited, sure. Sally was almost as bad. Barth fought against their sureness, irritable, stubborn, tired.

"Sure, you've got Lana in a car, and you've got her covering up. But you haven't got her in Arlington, nor in Phil Andrews' studio. Applejack was there and so were you, Amy. If Lana was there as well, it's up to us to prove it, and we've got a long way to go to do that. Do you girls want some dinner, or will you wait till we get home?"

No one wanted any dinner after that.

By the time they left the city behind them the rain had stopped, but

the pavement was slippery as grease, driving hard, and Barth's car old and burning oil.

The Arlington Pike was built on the old State Road, level as it followed the bottomland out of the city, but once across the river, a tortuous, winding, dangerous climb, made more dangerous by the dirt roads that intersected and crossed it. It was passing one of these intersections that they saw the blue sedan again.

It was parked off the main road, its lights dim and secretive, but flashed into a blinding glare as their car chugged by. And Barth thought, "The police waiting to pounce on speeders," and grinned at his thirty-five miles an hour. But through the back window, both Amy and Sally had caught the gleam of the telltale blue paint.

"It's Lana!" Amy shrieked. "That was Lana's car, but what would she be parked back there for? What—"

"It was her car, all right; I saw it, too," Sally said. "Maybe she saw us at that rent-a-car place, and wasn't sure. Maybe she's been waiting there, flashing her lights on the cars that went by, until she could be. she'll probably drive back to Jake's now and find out how much damage we've done her, and he'll get another fifty out of it. A good day's business for Jake."

"And it may be a poor one for us," Barth muttered. "I've never liked this set-up from the start, and I'm liking it less now. We're climbing Dead Man's Hill before long, and there's a fifty-foot drop on either side. I'd feel a lot better if that blue sedan were ahead of us and not behind."

"Barth!" Sally began, "Why Barth Whittaker! You don't think—"

She didn't finish.

"I'm leaving the thinking to you," Barth snapped. "I'm driving. But a killer who's killed once doesn't pull any punches when it comes to covering tracks!" And he put his foot on the gas and kept it there.

V.

Before them, looming a blacker shadow against the blackness of the sky, was Dead Man's Hill, a bad climb at the best of times. A doubly bad one at night, with its steep sides and its hairpin turns.

Rattling across the bridge that forded a rushing, tumbling creek, Barth threw his car in gear, and started up. He had made about half the grade when he heard the roar of the car behind him, and Sally's scream: "It's Lana—she's going to ram us, Barth! She's going to ram us off the road!"

The warning wasn't off her lips before the car was on them, grinding at Barth's light fenders, pushing its heavy bulk against them, crowding him over, over—each inch bringing him nearer to the pitch-black abyss on his left.

Afterward, Barth tried to bring some memory out of the nightmare. He couldn't. It seemed to him he hadn't done anything but grit his teeth, hang onto his wheel—and pray. Once he'd thought it was over and done with; that was when his rear wheel had gone over the bank. But a tree trunk had caught it, and some way, somehow, it was back on again, the tail lights of the big sedan had topped the hill, and they were still alive, and he was still praying.

It might have been the prayer. It might have been the stubbornness that refused to let him give up control. It might have been something of both. But, whatever the cause,

it was a miracle that had saved them, and Barth knew it. They all knew it. There was no word from any of them until they had reached the top of the hill, and then, oddly enough, it came from Amy—praise. Not for Barth, whose skillful handling had saved her life, but for the driver of the blue sedan. A grudging, wondering, puzzling praise.

"And I've called Lana Mathews a rotten driver! I've kidded her because she hadn't the nerve to go forty miles an hour! That bus was doing sixty up Dead Man's Hill, and she was handling it like a man! My God!"

Barth would have said the same thing, if he'd had the wind. The little he had seen of Lana's driving hadn't left any impression of skill on him, and it had taken skill and more, to try that trick! He was too weak to talk about it, and too mad. He had dragged Sally into this and nearly got her killed. All he wanted now was to see her safely home, dump Amy, and chase that blue sedan down. If it had been Lana's car and he could prove it—

It was Lana's car. They proved that, all right. But Lana wasn't doing any explaining—then. That came later. Their headlights picked the car up—or what was left of it—just outside the town limits where the highway, ditched on each side, swings sharply around a swampy piece of ground. Instead of turning, it had lunged straight forward, over the deep embankment, and stood, rear wheels on the edge, and its engine tunneled three feet deep in the mud of the opposite side.

Peering over the edge of the ditch, Barth could see one white, outstretched hand and the blob of a mangled face with fragments from a broken windshield stuck in it like

needles in a cushion. He gave one look and pushed the crowding, terrified girls behind him.

"Go get Doc Peterson," he barked. "It's only a couple of blocks farther down. Tell him to bring his son-in-law back with him. Go—both of you—and don't come back. This isn't a woman's job; it's a man's."

It was Sally who went. Amy stayed. That car held the only chance she had to prove her innocence. She wasn't leaving it then.

She was the one who held the flashlight Barth got from his car and gave her, while he climbed down into the ditch, eased Lana's still body out of the broken door and, with Amy's help, got it up to the road. He was leaning over her, listening to the faint stirring of her heart, and thinking, "At least she's alive!" when Amy called him. She was standing knee-deep in the water of the ditch, and Lana's purse that she had been hunting for was in her hand.

"I was after the record from that rent-a-car place," she said. "It's here in her bag. But there's something funny about this, Barth! This front seat—look; it's one of the kind that crank back and forward so anyone can drive it. See how it is—pushed back as far as it will go, and Lana was as short as I am. She never drives like that. She can't. Her feet don't reach the gas. She has to jack it forward. I've seen her do it a hundred times! I knew Lana couldn't have been driving that car tonight—I've felt it all along. And she wasn't. Dan Mathews was, Barth. He was! He's proud of his driving—boasts how he can make a car do everything but talk. He was the one who tried to push us off the road tonight—tried to kill us! And he wasn't doing it just to help Lana, or he wouldn't have left her . . . like this!

"Barth, it sounds crazy—maybe I am crazy—but I think Dan Mathews killed Philip himself. Maybe he'd found out about Lana and Philip, and lied about not coming home that night, to see if he'd catch them together. And . . . and when he came home and found she wasn't there, he snaked over to Phil's studio and caught them. And scared Lana into keeping still about it! He'd want her out of it—he knew if anyone connected her with Philip, it would bring him in. That's why he sent her back to Cleveland that night. Maybe he took her himself. That's why he tried to kill us, because he knew we were on her trail. And when he found out that maybe Lana wouldn't keep still any longer, he . . . he killed her! And . . . she's dead, Barth, and we never can prove it! Never!"

At first Barth had stared at her, dulled with amazement, stupid. But as her words poured on, choked, stuttering, almost incoherent, his skin began to prick, and he could feel the hair on his neck stirring.

Dan Mathews! Scheming, sly, ruthless. Dan Mathews with the thick, boasting mouth, and the eyes that never laughed. Who had tortured a dog to death and who would have seen Amy Biddle sent to the penitentiary or the chair, to even up a political score with her father! What a fool he had been! What a blind, blundering fool!

He caught Amy's hand and yanked her up the bank. He said:

"Lana isn't dead. Her heart's still beating. I felt it. And if she were, and they can prove that Dan killed her, how is that going to help you, or Applejack Jones? It's Andrews' murder we've got to prove. And a wife can't testify against her hus-

band; there's a law forbidding it.

"There's the doc's car now—he's got his son-in-law with him, and Sally. Listen, Amy—forget what you said to me. Keep still about it. I've got a scheme. I don't think the doc would stand for it, and I don't want him to know. Maybe it won't work anyway, but I'm sure as hell going to try!" And leaving Amy, he hurried down the road to meet the doctor.

Dr. Peterson had brought half Arlington's young generation into the world, and seen half its old generation out. He had learned to keep his head. He was out of the car and running toward Lana, before the lanky, long-faced man at the wheel had brought his car to a standstill.

"We've got her out and on the edge of the road, doc," he told him. "We've been the only ones along so far. She's badly hurt, but I think she's living. Amy Biddle is there with her. Sally told you, I suppose, how we happened to find her. I think you'd better take her to your house and give her first aid before you try and jolt her across town to the hospital. And while you're doing that, I'll take Sally, and drive over and break it to Dan."

He motioned Sally in with him, and told her what had happened, as he drove, jerking his words out, from twisted lips, as he swung recklessly around the curve and headed for town. Told her what Amy had said, driving it home with his own conviction.

"Dan did it, Sally, sure as there's a God above us! He killed Phil Andrews, just as he tried to kill us. Just as he tried to kill Lana. And maybe has. It wasn't the glass she got from that broken windshield that ailed her—he must have hit her

first. There was a hole in the back of her head I could darn near have stuck my fist in, and she fell forward on her face. On her face when I found her, in a car so thick with plush upholstery it was like a pillow. But we can't even prove that on him. We couldn't go on a witness stand and swear he was driving that car and tell the truth, any more than his wife could take the stand against him if we charged him with Phil's murder.

"There's only one thing to do. Catch him off his guard and scare a confession out of him. That's what I'm going to try and do—now. I'm going to take a lesson from Amy. She's got something, that kid. I'm going to pull a bluff and I'm going to have Sheriff Olson there when I do it.

"You know the side road that comes in right there at the turn? I'm going to tell Dan Mathews that Doc Peterson was on that road—that he was driving home from a sick call and saw him plunk Lana and jump out of the car as it headed for the ditch. The door on the driver's side was open, and torn right off its hinges. That's the way I got her out. I'm going to tell him that Lana is dead and he's being held for her murder. And then I'm going to toss that little matter of Phil Andrews right in his face. A man can't burn more than once. Knowing he's caught for one crime, he wouldn't care very much what he said about another.

"The guy's yellow, Sally. All bullies are yellow. And he was crazy about Lana. He isn't feeling any too hot now, waiting there in that house of his, for her to be found. Here's the sheriff's house. Olson will probably put up a kick. If things go wrong, it'll mean his

job. But when I come out, I'll have him with me, if I have to drag him. And you were in on the start of this, Sally; I'd like you in on the finish. It may be Mathews' finish—and it may be mine. But whichever way it goes, I'd feel better if you were there."

"Do you think I'd have it any other way?" Sally asked quietly, while Bart's fingers tightened for an instant around hers, and his eyes gave her their gratitude.

It proved to be almost a case of dragging with the sheriff. But he went at last. Scared, grumbling, dazed at what Barth had told him. Unconvinced. And the finish, when it came, wasn't a pretty one.

Dan had met them, and let them in. His eyes were bloodshot, his legs unsteady. He reeked with whisky. Through the wide archway opening into the living room, Barth saw a half-emptied bottle on a table, and the glass beside it, and he nodded, tight-lipped, to Sally. Waiting for someone to find Lana's wrecked car, and the pitiful, tragic figure he had left in it, *hadn't* been easy for Dan Mathews!

"The game's up, Dan," Barth said softly. "You aren't as good a murderer as you are a politician. You made two bad mistakes tonight. The first, when you thought your lights would blind Amy and Sally and me, so we wouldn't see who was driving that car on Dead Man's Hill, and the other when you gave Lana that blow on the head and sent her car head-on into the ditch. You thought you had finished us, didn't you, so we'd never bring you into that little matter of Phil Andrews' death? You thought you had taken care of Lana, so she could never tell that you had killed Phil and tried to kill us. You

thought you had done it so cleverly. An accident! How terrible! You thought, 'I am safe.' It's been a bad day, Dan. You've lost out everywhere. You forgot that I'm not such a bad driver, myself. That it might not be as easy to push me off Dead Man's Hill as you thought it was. You forgot that we might have seen you when you tried to do it. But the big thing you forgot was that side road out there by the turn, and the fact that wet weather and slippery pavements can't keep old Doc Peterson in, when someone is sick and needs him. He wasn't wasting any time trying to catch you. His business was taking care of Lana. He knew the other could wait. And it did wait, until I drove up in my car.

"He's got Lana over at his house now, and I've got Sheriff Olson here with a warrant for your arrest, as her murderer.

"You're going to burn, Dan Mathews. Too bad you didn't come clean about Phil Andrews. You might have had some chance there—the 'unwritten law' still goes with a jury. But a wife killer. Not so good, Dan. Not so good.

"There he is, Olson. The man who killed Philip Andrews. The man who tried his best to kill Amy and Sally and me tonight, and finished by killing his wife. You don't have to ask him if he's guilty. Look at him. The evidence is in his face."

Barth could hear Sally's choked-back sobs, and put an arm across her shoulder. There was a green line around his lips, and his stomach was twisting. The collapse of Dan Mathews was a horrible thing to see. The full, florid face grown suddenly gray, pendulous, flabby. Heavy shoulders slumping. Big hands that at first had clenched themselves into threatening fists,

hanging loose, as though they had no part with the hairy wrists that owned them. And the hoarse, broken words that found their way through his twisting lips were just as horrible to hear.

This was a Dan Mathews who, under other conditions, could be pitied. And yet, too, it was the same Dan Mathews who had always been coarse and challenging when he was on top of the heap.

His eyes were horrible to see. They were filled with hate. His was the bitter voice of a man who might well have played around with women himself, whose code might have been crooked and ruthless, but who spat venom and thwarted hate when his own home was violated. This was the man who, if he could crawl to the top again—and he never could, now—would be the same cruel Dan Mathews who drew pleasure from the act of torturing a dog. His words crackled. His voice shook.

"Sure I killed the bastard! Why wouldn't I? Lana loved him. She was my wife, and she'd given herself to him. I'd been watching her—I'd found out things she didn't know I even dreamed of. When I got home that night, and they told me she'd left for the city, I knew she was lying. I knew I'd find her with

him. She was. I sneaked in the back way, up the alley, and into the garage. I saw her there. They were talking. She'd been his mistress, and he was through with her. She was on her knees, hanging onto him, bawling. That gun of his was on the desk—right there in plain sight. I walked in, grabbed it up and shot him. I shot him twice. I was in a hurry, or I'd have emptied the whole damn gun in his dirty face. And I told Lana what she'd get if she ever squealed or tried to walk out on me ever again. I knew she wouldn't dare.

"She'd been in the city all right—had sneaked down in a rent-a-car. I sent her back in it. As long as I could keep her name out of the mess, I'd be more sure of keeping my own. Everything played into my hands—everything. Even when Applejack swore he'd heard a woman in the studio, there was that fool Biddle kid to take the rap. I was safe until you began your damn snooping, Whittaker. I wish to God I had shoved you off the road tonight. I thought I had, and so did Lana. That was why I had to . . . to kill her. Sitting there in that car, yelling, 'Murderer! Murderer! Murderer!' at me, until I couldn't stand it. I rapped her on the head with a

NO FINER DRINK AT ANY TIME!

BETTER TASTE...

PEPSI-COLA

... BIGGER DRINK

Purity
... in the big big bottle
— that's Pepsi-Cola!

wrench that I keep in the car pocket. I left the car in gear, and stepped on the gas, and jumped.

"Go ahead, damn you! Go ahead—take me in. I loved her. Laugh if you want to. I loved her, and . . . and . . . she's dead—"

Lana didn't die. She lived, but she never took the stand against her husband. He hanged himself, three days after his arrest. A leather belt, wound over the steam pipes in the ceiling of his cell.

Court is in session again, and Applejack Jones has a job. A self-appointed job. When he isn't washing Barth's windows or cleaning his office, he stands on the sidewalk beneath the lettered sign, and tells everyone and anyone who will stop

to listen, that "Barthy Whittaker is the best gol-darn lawyer in Arlington County!" And that "Sid Cole had best make the most of his job whilst he's got it, for he ain't going to have it very long—not with a smart young feller like Barthy Whittaker around!"

Barth calls Applejack a crazy old coot, and laughs a little wryly when he remembers that it took a girl like Amy Biddle to show him the truth his own eyes had been too blind to see. But Amy, married at last to a boy who knows her story and is big enough to forgive, says maybe Applejack Jones isn't so crazy after all.

Sally Grey knows he isn't, although she can't be as open about saying so as Amy.

THE END.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

MURDER COMES EASY

Barry Pate could never have visualized himself in this role. A killer. A man who could take life. Yet, Bert Kosco, underworld king, had murdered Barry's best friend, and Kosco was almost above the law. So Barry Pate waited; waited his chance. He did not consider it murder to kill a creature like Kosco. But the law would so consider it; there could be absolutely no doubt about that.

"Barry Pate steadied his hand against the window frame and sighted down the snub barrel of the automatic. The fat, gross figure of Bert Kosco, gangster and murderer, wavered before his eyes. Barry's gun leaped in his hand. Kosco's great barrel body toppled forward—"

That's a passage from the story, "Murder Comes Easy," featured in next month's

DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE

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MYSTERY AT THE DOG POUND

A Novelette

by ROBERT W. COCHRAN

When a prominent man was gassed, instead of his dog, Sheriff Tom Russel realized he had to give the case all he had.

I.

I was in Tom Russel's office when the telephone call came. We had been trying to devise some method by which Tom could succeed himself as county sheriff. Election was less than a month away and Tom was gloomy. "I need a break, Ray," he said, and at that moment the phone tinkled.

Tom took his feet down from the desk. "Another lost dog," he said wryly. "Why don't they call Luke Blodgett?"

"Hello," he said into the mouthpiece. "Yes, this is the sheriff." Then his tone and face underwent

a change. "Oh, yes, Mrs. Trent. Well, I don't know that I can. . . . How long ago? . . . Sure, I'll go out and talk with him, but I doubt if it will do any good. . . . Yes, I'll go immediately. I'll do my best."

He hung up. "There you are," he said sarcastically, "there's the kind of breaks I get. That was Charlotte Trent. Her husband took that Dane of hers to the pound a while ago to have it destroyed. She wants me to save it. Wants me to antagonize the richest man in Clarkesville on the eve of an election."

The Clarkesville pound had been built by Trent at his wife's instiga-

tion soon after their marriage. There were pictures of the building in the Sunday newspapers. Clarkesville, a town of only eight thousand, had a pound that rivaled those of many large cities. We were proud of the spotless tiled cages, the beautifully-laid-out grounds, and the gas chamber where incurable animals were destroyed. It occupied four acres, inclosed by an eight-foot fence, about a mile from the center of town.

When Tom got into his car, I followed without waiting for an invitation. "If I'm too late," he said sourly, "it will be a break, and I probably will be. She said he left the house quite some time ago."

"Why do you suppose he wanted the Dane killed?" I asked. "I always thought he was a friendly brute." I meant the Dane, of course; no one could call Trent friendly.

"You know Trent," Tom said. "If he got tired of having the dog around, that would be reason enough."

In spite of Tom's hope that he would get to the pound too late to intervene, he didn't waste any time. "Talk about a dog's paradise!" he said when he stopped the car. "This is it."

Some half dozen dogs in outdoor runs stared at us curiously as we entered the premises. "They even have a place for cats," Tom said. "I wish we had something like this for kids to enjoy themselves."

I called Tom's attention to the fact that ours was the only car in the street. "I suppose Trent walked," he said, and led the way into the red-brick building. It was my first time inside the place since it had been operating.

"Hey, Luke," Tom called. Luke Blodgett, the pound master, was in fact the entire staff. He was paid

seventy-five dollars from a trust fund provided by Jonathan Trent, or, more accurately, by his wife.

"Anybody here?" Tom called again. "Down this way," he said when silence was his only answer, and I followed him into the basement. We went then into a smaller room, and I saw the big metal gas chamber that took up fully half of it.

"Well"—Tom stopped just inside the door—"we're either too early or too late."

"You think he's already had the Dane killed?" I asked.

Tom shrugged. "If he has, the dog's body's still in there, probably."

There was a small glass panel in one end of the metal box. Tom went over and put his face up close to this. Then he raised a hand to shield his eyes and looked a second time. "I wish I'd thought to bring a flash," he said. "It looks like—Come over here, Ray."

I don't know why I should have felt squeamish over looking at a dead dog. Perhaps that hollow feeling in my stomach was caused by the strange inflection in Tom's voice. "Is it the Dane?" I asked. Then I had my eyes up close to the small glass panel. I could just make out that the box was not empty and, like Tom, I raised one hand to shield my eyes from the ceiling light. It helped a little, but very little. I saw something, not clearly, but plain enough to send a cold shiver along my back.

I turned to look at Tom. He was twisting some valves at the front of the box, but I could tell by the expression on his face that he had seen the same thing that I had.

"It'll take a little while to flush the fumes out," he said. "I'm going to call Doc Madden." I heard his feet on the stairs as he ran up to the office; then I took a second look

through the panel. There was no denying that the thing I saw was a foot, and not a dog's foot, either, but that of a man.

Tom came back. "We'll open her up now," he said. "Madden'll be right over."

He released the lugs and the big door swung outward. There was still a definite odor of gas, but I held my breath and put my head alongside Tom's. A man's body rested in a sitting position, the shoulders down, the head almost upon the outstretched legs. I could not see the face.

We each got hold of a shoulder and pulled. The gas was pretty bad when I finally drew a deep breath. I got a look at the man's face, and stared for thirty seconds to make sure my eyes weren't tricking me.

Tom said, "Why in the name of the little blue devils doesn't Madden come?"

"Listen," I said. Deadened by masonry walls though it was, the outcry was still unmistakable. Apparently every dog on the place was howling with that mysterious, eerie wail that is their way of announcing death.

Tom dropped on his knees and felt for the heartbeat. Then he raised the eyelids, and though Jonathan Trent was dead, there was, so far as I could see, no difference in his eyes. They had always reminded me of those of a dead fish, but never quite so realistically as at that moment.

Tom stood up and dusted his hands together, a gesture that seemed to say, there's nothing I can do for you, Mr. Trent.

"Dead," I said inanely.

"As dead as John Brown," Tom agreed. "And his murder probably means the political death of an ambitious young sheriff."

"Murder!" I repeated the sinister

word. Oddly enough, until that moment I had not seen Jonathan Trent's death as murder. The clamor of the dogs began to subside. I remembered the Dane. "What do you suppose happened to the dog?" I asked Tom.

He didn't answer. "Those winged nuts," he said, pointing to the lugs he had turned to open the door of the gas chamber, "might have had fingerprints on them, but I've managed to rub them off. A hell of a detective I am!"

We heard a voice calling from the floor above and Tom answered, "Down here, doc." When Madden came into the little room he halted and stared for an instant at the dead man; then he did very much the same things that Tom had done, only he tried the heart with a stethoscope. He straightened up finally. "How did it happen?" he asked, looking from Tom to me and then back at Tom.

"I wish I knew," Tom said. He explained then about the phone call from Mrs. Trent.

"It would have been a crime," Doc Madden said, "to kill a dog like that. Smart wasn't the word for it. Ward, that was the dog's name. You know, if it wasn't so fantastic, I'd be inclined to believe—"

Tom raised his hand. "The dog that did this walked out of here on two feet, not four. The first thing I want to know is what's happened to Luke Blodgett. Ray, you might get on the phone upstairs and see what you can find out. Call the Trent house, too, and ask about the dog. We'll run over there presently."

As I went up the stairs, I heard Tom ask Doc Madden if he could make a close guess as to how long Trent had been dead. I reversed the order of Tom's commands and rang the Trent home first. A maid an-



A man's body rested in a sitting position, the shoulders and head sagging. From that angle, I could not see the face.

swered. I explained that Mrs. Trent had called concerning her dog, and since the animal wasn't at the pound, I wondered if it had returned.

"Oh, yes," the maid said, "Ward's here; he came back a little while ago. Mrs. Trent tried to get Mr. Russel at his office, but no one answered."

I didn't explain why no one answered. I asked about Luke Blodgett. The phone I was using was beside a window, and even as I asked the question I saw Luke drive up in the light truck that he used. He had a heavy net in one hand and a rifle in the other as he came up the walk to the door. I hung up with the maid still talking; I wanted to speak to Luke before he got downstairs.

He came into the building, put the net and rifle into a closet, and said, "Someone's making believe it's April Fool's day. How come the sheriff's and doc's cars are here?" He jerked his head toward the street. He was acting wary as a lizard.

Instead of answering, I asked, "Who's making believe it's April Fool?"

"Woman called and said there was a mad dog on Easter Road."

"What woman?"

"There wasn't no dog," he said; "leastways I couldn't find one. Been gone"—he looked at the clock on the wall—"since before twelve. Ain't even had my lunch."

"I wish I hadn't," I said, and watched the surprised look that came over Blodgett's face as the dogs started howling again.

"They don't never do that," he said. Then apparently he remembered the two cars, for he said, "Doc and the sheriff—they're here, ain't they?"

"They're downstairs," I said.

"Maybe you'd better go down and talk to Tom."

"I'm hungry as a drake," he said pointedly.

"You won't be," I told him. "Let's go down."

He followed me reluctantly. We went through the big room and into the little one where the gas chamber was. I turned around to see what effect the sight of Trent would have on Blodgett. His jaw hung open as though he had been about to say something, and the color drained from his face, leaving it looking a shade less lifelike than the dead man's.

"That," Blodgett said, finally, "is Mr. Trent."

Tom asked, "You didn't stuff him in that gas box and open the cock, did you, Luke?"

"God, no, Tom!" Blodgett protested fearfully. "I . . . I been out lookin' for a mad dog. Some woman called." As I remembered it later, the man seemed almost beside himself with fright.

Tom asked, "Did you know that Mr. Trent was going to bring that Dane out here to be destroyed?"

"Ward? Gee!" Blodgett's face was blank.

Doc had been making a second examination of Trent's body. He stood up and looked at his watch and spoke to Tom, answering apparently some question that Tom had asked before I had come down. "It's one-thirty," he said. "He's been dead between forty-five minutes and an hour and a quarter."

"Between twelve-fifteen and twelve-forty-five," Tom said. "That call from Mrs. Trent was before twelve thirty. Thanks, doc. Ray, let's go up to the Trents. I'll notify Cooper on the way." Barney Cooper was the local undertaker.

Luke Blodgett followed us up-

stairs and asked Tom, "You mean I got to stay here alone?" Some of the color had come back to his face, but not enough to make him look healthy."

Tom said grimly, "He won't bother you, Luke, not any more."

"What did you mean by that last crack?" I asked Tom when we were in his car.

"Just a shot in the dark," Tom said. "Trent's been playing up to Luke's daughter. I don't think she fell for it, but if this hadn't happened, there might have been a different story. She's a maid in the Trent house."

"You don't think Luke—"

"You jump at conclusions," Tom snapped. "I don't think Luke did it. I don't think anyone did it. All that I know is that somebody did. Figure that out." He grinned at me, so I knew that he wasn't as sore as he pretended to be.

I sat in the car while he went into Barney Cooper's. When he came out he said, "Barney saw Trent around noon. He had the Dane on a leash and was going in the direction of the pound." He drove half a block and made a second stop. I wasn't surprised. It was in front of the telephone exchange. "Two seconds," he said, getting out and running up the steps.

It wasn't much longer than that, really, but from his face I didn't think he had discovered anything. "I thought there might be a record of calls going out from the pound or the Trent home, but I was wrong."

I had been in Jonathan Trent's house any number of times, as delivery clerk for Hart & Hart, during summer vacations when I was in college. It was a big house, somewhere between forty and fifty years old, with extensive well-kept grounds.

Jonathan Trent's father had made a fortune, it was generally understood, in railroad stock and built the big house when he retired. He had been still alive and I saw him occasionally back at the time I made deliveries there. His son had been brought up to enjoy to the full the wealth his father had accumulated. Jonathan Trent was our local Don Juan.

Tom parked before the closed garage doors. My earliest remembrance of the garage was when it had been used to house the Trent horses. Somewhere inside the house the Dane began to bark, but he stopped immediately. I walked beside Tom along the flagstone path to the front entrance.

Tom pulled the old-fashioned knocker and while we waited said in a whisper to me, "Use your head, Ray."

The door opened and I recognized Luke Blodgett's daughter. Tom said, "Martha, we would like to see Mrs. Trent."

I wondered if Luke had called the house, because the girl looked so badly frightened. Her eyes were averted and her hands kept opening and closing. She led us down a wide hall into the living room.

"I'll tell her, Mr. Russel," she said, but she stood for several seconds in the doorway before she disappeared.

Tom caught my eye and jerked his head after her retreating footsteps. I shrugged, because I didn't get his meaning.

The sound of the Dane breathing was the first warning we had of Charlotte Trent's approach. We stood up as she entered the room. The dog sniffed the air and stared at us. He was a harlequin, about the size of a pony. "Down, Ward," his mistress said, and the dog settled to the floor. His head dropped

to his outstretched forepaws, and he gave the impression of relaxed vigilance, ready on the slightest provocation to fly to the woman's defense.

Charlotte Trent I knew only by sight. Jonathan Trent, on one of his periodic trips to the Eastern cities, had married her and brought her back with him. That had been two years before. She was a small woman. I placed her age at under thirty-five. If she had make-up on, I could not detect it. Her eyes were large, too large, as though something had alarmed her, causing them to dilate and never allowing them to return to their natural size.

She called us each by name and indicated that we were to sit down. "I'm sorry to have bothered you, Mr. Russel," she said to Tom. She looked at the dog affectionately. "Ward was home shortly after I called you."

Tom's eyes met mine for an instant, and he drew a deep breath. "Mrs. Trent," he began, "can you think of anyone who would like to do your husband bodily injury?"

She stared straight before her as she considered the question. I was more than a little surprised by her answer. "I can think of any number of persons, Mr. Russel."

Tom said, "That is unfortunate. Mrs. Trent, your husband is dead; probably I should say he has been murdered." I saw that Tom was being purposely blunt in order to witness the effect of his announcement.

The Dane let a rumbling growl issue from his throat as Mrs. Trent whispered, "Dead!"

"He was killed," Tom said, "between twelve and one o'clock today."

"You said murdered?" Charlotte Trent had partially regained her composure.

Tom nodded. "He was placed in the gas chamber at the pound and

the gas was turned on. I want a list of the people you suggested might like to do your husband injury."

"Mr. Russel," she accused, "you took an unfair advantage in letting me make that statement." She looked at me as though considering my importance as a witness.

"It should not be too difficult," Tom continued, "to gather suspects. Did you by any chance, Mrs. Trent, call Luke Blodgett and send him to apprehend a mad dog?"

"A mad dog," she repeated and looked at the Dane. "I'm afraid I don't understand—"

"Someone called Luke," Tom explained. "Since there was no mad dog, it seems obvious now that it was just a ruse to leave the premises deserted."

I could not refrain from asking a question that popped in my mind. "Tom, would Luke have locked up when he left?"

"Possibly," Tom said after a moment's thought, "but any number of people know that a key hangs always at the edge of the door frame, just out of reach of small children."

"Yes, I knew that," Mrs. Trent admitted. She placed her hand to her forehead. "There are certain formalities to attend to, but I cannot make myself believe—"

Tom said sympathetically, "I've notified Mr. Cooper. Dr. Madden came immediately. Burial will be here, of course, and you will want the services from the house."

"You are very kind," she said with a quick smile. "From your remarks a moment ago, I assume that I, too, will be a suspect in my husband's death?"

Tom fidgeted in his chair. "Not necessarily. Can you establish your position between twelve and one o'clock?"

"I was here," she said. "Here in

the house. I usually lie down before lunch. Martha woke me with her account of my husband taking Ward to the pound. I called you immediately."

"That should be sufficient," Tom said. "I would like to speak with your staff. There are how many, Mrs. Trent?"

Her voice was low and perfectly composed when she answered, "Mrs. Knox, the housekeeper; Elsie, the cook; and Martha. Then, of course, there's Elmer Druid, who does the outside work."

"Would you include your servants among those who will be well satisfied by Mr. Trent's death?" Tom asked.

"Most of them," Mrs. Trent said promptly. "My husband was not an easy man to work for, or to live with," she concluded.

"I would like to talk with them, one at a time, if I may," Tom said.

Mrs. Trent rose, but she did not start at once for the door. Tom and I also stood up.

"I will ask them to come in," she said, and then, as though she could no longer restrain her feelings, she put her hands to her face and ran from the room. The big dog lurched to his feet and followed her without so much as a glance in our direction.

II.

Tom resumed his seat and I crossed to his side. "Got any ideas?" I asked in a whisper.

"Plenty," he said. "I don't feel sorry for the victim, though."

"Maybe you've forgotten there's going to be an election next month—"

"I haven't forgotten," he interrupted, "but I haven't lived in the same town with Jonathan Trent all my life for nothing."

I heard footsteps in the hall as Tom motioned for silence. Mrs. Knox came into the room. She called us both by our first names. She had been the housekeeper at the Trent home ever since I could remember, yet she was not old. Her middle forties, perhaps.

Tom said, "Close the door, will you, Ray."

When the three of us were seated, he spoke to Mrs. Knox. "Do you know what's happened?"

Her nod was her only answer.

Tom said, "I've never investigated a murder before. I may be doing it wrong. I want to know where everyone in this house was between twelve fifteen and twelve forty-five. Mrs. Trent said that she was taking a nap and Martha woke her up."

Mrs. Knox nodded again. "I sent Martha to wake her. I thought that she ought to know about the dog—"

Someone knocked on the door and Tom called, "Come in." The maid, Martha, entered, her hands still twisting nervously.

"It's the telephone," she said, her eyes focusing somewhere between Mrs. Knox and Tom. "It's for you, Mr. Russel."

"I'll be right back," Tom said to Mrs. Knox. He flashed me a look that seemed to say, "Pump her if you can." Then he followed the maid into the hall.

"This is a terrible business, Ray," the housekeeper said, her face tight and strained, "but I give you my word that Mrs. Trent is not mixed up in it. She would die before she would harm any living thing."

"I believe that," I said, "and I'm sure Tom feels the same way. You can depend on him to do the right thing, Mrs. Knox."

I thought that she was going to say something else, but just then Tom returned. He gave me a look



"Mrs. Trent," Tom began, "can you think of anyone who would like to do your husband bodily injury?"

that carried some kind of message, but I failed to get it. Tom took an envelope from his pocket and said as he wrote, "Mrs. Trent, Mrs. Knox, Martha Blodgett, Elsie—" He stopped and looked at Mrs. Knox.

"Carr," Mrs. Knox said.

"Carr," Tom repeated, writing the name, "and Elmer Druid. That all?" He looked at the housekeeper.

Mrs. Knox nodded. "I can vouch for Elsie and Martha, and since Martha called Mrs. Trent, that leaves only Elmer. He has a wooden leg, and he doesn't drive a car."

Tom stood up. "Thank you, Mrs. Knox. Will you send Martha in?"

The housekeeper stopped, one hand on the doorknob. I couldn't help thinking again how strikingly handsome she was. Her black hair and dark eyes contrasted beautifully with her fair skin. She spoke directly to Tom. "I suppose you know about Julia Burton?" She asked the question with visible reluctance.

Tom smiled grimly. "I know the general talk," he said. "Was she one of Mr. Trent's failings, too?"

Mrs. Knox's lips pressed firmly together as though she had said already more than she should have. She went out, leaving the door partly open. I looked at Tom, half expecting an explanation of the telephone call. He pretended not to notice, and asked instead, "Did she say anything helpful? It seems I remember you having a crush on her when you were a kid."

"On Mrs. Knox?" I said, attempting to act surprised. I couldn't deny the crush.

Martha Blodgett came in, shy and wary as a partridge, and looking not unlike one, either, for she had the pleasing plumpness of a country girl who has never heard of reducing diets or muscular massages. She gave us each a frightened glance,

then stood with downcast eyes. Tom said, "Martha, you don't have to be afraid of talking to us. Do you know of anyone who could have had cause to harm Mr. Trent?"

While Martha was searching for an answer, I thought that Tom was starting a long way from the beginning. Jonathan Trent had been making enemies all his life.

Martha answered finally, "I don't know, Mr. Russel."

Tom asked, "You're quite sure Mrs. Trent was asleep when you went to call her?"

"Oh, yes"—Martha nodded emphatically—"I'm sure of that."

"What about Elmer Druid?" I saw Martha wince beneath Tom's altered tone.

"Elmer was here," Martha said, but her voice somehow lacked conviction.

Tom wrote quickly on a slip of paper and handed it to me. "Go out to the garage and see if there is any heat in either of the motors."

I was conscious of Martha's frightened glance following me as I closed the door.

There were two cars in the garage, a sedan and a coupé. I lifted the hood of the coupé first and touched the motor gingerly. I felt the heat even before my fingers contacted the metal. Since the day was warm, it was obvious that the motor would retain its heat for a considerable time, but it was likewise apparent that the car had been driven within the past few hours. I lowered the hood with a feeling of satisfaction and crossed to the sedan. My pleasure over what I had discovered suffered no relapse when the sedan's motor was cold to my fingers.

I was half tempted to go in search of Elmer Druid; then I remembered that I was, after all, only an observer. I returned to the house.

Elsie Carr was just entering the living room; I followed her.

I held up one finger in answer to Tom's look of inquiry, and he nodded with satisfaction. The cook's answers followed the pattern that was now quite familiar to me. She was probably between thirty-five and forty. Her face had a calm, almost vacant look, and I was convinced as I studied her that here, at least, we would not discover enough intelligence to plan and carry out a crime.

Tom dismissed her after a few questions and ordered Elmer Druid sent in. She left the room with no more expression on her face than if we had been discussing a cake recipe. "Well?" Tom asked, when the door had closed at her back.

"The coupé," I said. "I don't know how long since it's been run, but certainly this morning."

Tom lowered his voice. "Does anything strike you particularly odd about the answers we're getting?"

"Only a lack of imagination," I said.

Tom shook his head. "What I'm getting at is that all of them are determined that Mrs. Trent will have a perfect alibi. If the gardener takes the same course, I'm going to be suspicious of Mrs. Trent."

"She couldn't kill anything," I said.

"You, too," Tom grinned, and I saw how readily I had accepted Mrs. Trent's innocence.

"What about that phone call?" I tried changing the subject.

Tom looked at the closed door and leaned toward me. "Barney Cooper," he said. "Trent had a bad clip on the back of his head and the mark of a dog's teeth on one arm. A big

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dog, like this Dane. Doc will make an autopsy this afternoon to see what actually caused death."

Before I could comment on this latest unexpected news, the door opened and Elmer Druid came in. He had a wooden leg, true enough, but he wore a shoe on it and except for a betraying squeak and a slight limp it did not seem to handicap his movements. He was not a big man, nor particularly muscular. Though I had seen him often, this was the first time I had spoken to him.

Tom pointed to a chair. "You know who I am?" He asked it as a question. The man nodded and looked for several seconds at each of us in turn.

"Then you know why I'm here?" Again a nod served as a reply.

"You look after the Trent cars," Tom stated.

There was a moment's hesitation on the man's part, and then instead of the nod he spoke. "Generally," he said.

"Who used the coupé this morning?" Tom demanded, moving now to the outer edge of his chair.

The man's eyes flicked for a moment in the direction of the closed door. "No one that I know of," he said. I saw satisfaction in Tom's face.

"You were here on the premises all morning?"

Again a nod.

"And yet you don't know whether the cars were used or not."

A hostile stare this time. Tom had, I saw, intentionally twisted the man's answer. Druid wet his lips with his tongue, but said nothing.

"Do you drive a car?" Tom asked, breaking a silence that was becoming uncomfortably long.

The gardener shook his head, and tapped with one blunt finger his artificial leg.

"Let's see your pocketbook." Tom put on his hand.

The man started to reach for his back trousers pocket and caught himself. "I haven't one," he said.

Tom stood up. "So that's your story." He was, I saw, quite well pleased. "We'll go down to the jail—" Tom began.

"Are you arresting me, mister?"

"Call it that if you like," Tom said. "A man has been killed; someone has to be arrested."

The gardener's lips moved back from his teeth. I didn't know whether it was a snarl or a grin; his eyes didn't change. He put his hand in his pocket and brought out a worn billfold. Tom glanced through the sparse contents and extracted an automobile driver's license. "So you don't drive a car," he accused.

Druid's face flushed. "I don't now, not since I lost my leg."

Tom asked, "Where did Mrs. Trent go when she went out this morning?"

The man bit his lip and said nothing.

"All right," Tom said, "I'm going to hold you as a material witness." He turned to me. "Ray, ask Mrs. Trent if you may take her car, the coupé. Drive over to the pound and see if you can find anyone who remembers seeing that car, or any car, there this noon. I'll be at the office when you get through."

Mrs. Trent's hesitation, when I asked for the use of the car, was too short to have any significance. It didn't take long to canvass the neighborhood around the pound. No one, it seemed, ever paid any attention to automobiles. I saw Luke Blodgett's truck at the side of the building and stopped. The dogs in the pens were quiet. I found Luke in the back, cleaning some empty runs.

"Found who done it?" he asked when he saw me.

I shook my head.

"Well, I found something," He thrust his hand in his pocket and brought out a small felt gadget. I couldn't identify it at first and he let me take it in my hand. Then when I had turned it over I recognized it as a decoration from a woman's shoe. "It was on the basement stairs," Luke said.

"I'm going down to the sheriff's office," I said. "I'll take it along."

"Well," Luke said, "I reckon it's all right, since you're working with the sheriff." It was my first public recognition. I felt grateful to Luke for it.

III.

During the short ride into town, I was busy wondering as to the identity of the owner of the pair of shoes from which that gadget had come. I parked the Trent car and went into Tom's office. He was writing something on a pad at his desk.

"Murder all solved?" I asked, dropping into a chair.

He leered at me in a manner that suggested he had something he was holding back. I decided that I was in a position to bargain. "I've got a gimcrack here," I said, extending my closed hand, "that will identify a visitor at the scene of the crime."

"All right," Tom said. "Anything else?"

"No luck on the cars. But this—" I still had my fingers closed.

"I know about that," Tom said impatiently. "A piece of felt off a lady's shoe."

I threw it at him in disgust. The answer popped into my head. Of course, Luke would have called him. While he studied the piece of felt, he said to me, "Doc called a while ago. Trent died of gas, all right,

but he may have been unconscious at the time. That blow on his head could have knocked him out. The marks on his arm weren't serious. There will be an inquest tomorrow."

"Get anything more out of Druid?" I asked.

Tom wagged his head. "No, but I'm going to. I made another call, though, that might interest you." He paused to give my curiosity time to become aroused. "Julia Burton."

If Jonathan Trent had been our Don Juan, by similar standards Julia Burton was our Messalina. Twice married and divorced, she had now passed beyond even the mantle of respectability, but she cared for an invalid mother and an aged father, and once I had heard Tom describe her as not a sinner, but an unfortunate female who had never learned to say, "no."

"So," I said, "you went to call on Julie! Business?"

He ignored my insinuation. "Julie was a gold mine," he said. "She told me among other things that Charlotte Trent is going to have a baby."

I couldn't see that a baby altered the case so I asked, "What other things?"

Tom answered savagely, "That Trent was a worse fiend than I credited him with being. He intended to deny that the child was his."

"The devil," I said. "I'm glad he's dead."

"Who isn't?" Tom asked. "And yet I have to be the one to try and pin his murder on someone."

"Maybe Julie was pulling your leg," I suggested.

"That was my thought," Tom admitted. "I made a second call on Mrs. Trent. I found out more about the dog episode, too. Trent struck her last night—not the first time, either—and the dog attacked him.

That explains the marks on Trent's arm."

"Too bad the dog didn't finish the job," I said. "Can't we call it suicide, or maybe an accident?"

"An accident," Tom repeated. And then louder, "An accident." He picked up the phone. I was surprised at the sudden change in his manner. He got Luke Blodgett at the pound. I heard him order Luke to go to the Trent house immediately. "Ray," he said to me when he had hung up, "find Doc Madden and go out to Trent's. I'll meet you there."

It didn't take long to find Doc Madden, but I could see he was becoming a little bored with the Trent case. "Tom thinks it was an accident," I said. Doc snorted.

Tom had arrived ahead of us. Luke Blodgett's truck was there, too. I followed doc into the living room and tried to show no surprise when I saw Julie Burton in a chair off to herself. The room was quiet except for the murmur of Tom and Mrs. Knox. The cook and the gardener had chairs near the door, and next to them were Martha and her father. Mrs. Trent sat nearest the window, her face pale but perfectly composed, as though no further trial or humiliation could hurt her. The Dane lay at her feet.

Tom got up and, walking to the door, closed it. He stood with his back to it, letting his eyes rake the room. I had never seen him present quite such a commanding appearance before. He cleared his throat and spoke slowly.

"I am here only to see that justice is done. If a murder has been committed, I expect to get the murderer. If a chain of circumstances has produced an unbelievable accident, it is my wish to bring the facts into the open. Most of you know me well

enough to know that I am not a detective. Whatever I accomplish must be with your aid."

I could feel something magnetic in his personality working on his listeners.

"Most of you," he continued, "know Mrs. Burton. Anyone wanting to go by an inconspicuous route from this house to the pound might reasonably pass her house."

Chairs creaked, and I saw Mrs. Knox exchange glances with the gardener.

"Mrs. Burton," Tom asked, "did you see one of the Trent cars pass your home today?"

Julie gave us all what she probably thought was a winsome smile; it was nearer a simper. "Yes," she said.

Tom asked, "Which car, and who was in it?"

"The little car," Julie said. "Mrs. Trent was driving and he"—she pointed at the gardener—"was with her."

Tom took the piece of felt from his pocket and extended it to Mrs. Trent. "Are you able to identify this?"

She looked at it only an instant, then turned her eyes again to the window. "Yes," she said, "it is off a shoe of mine."

Tom asked, "Do you know where it was found?"

She did not reply for a moment, and I could see her turning over in her mind the possible outcome of her answer. "I think I do," she said finally.

Tom looked at the gardener. He sat with downcast eyes. "Mrs. Burton," Tom said, "did you see the car when it returned?"

She nodded, her eyes going sympathetically to Mrs. Trent.

"Were the same two passengers in it?"

"Only Mrs. Trent," Julie said. "Only Mrs. Trent and the dog," she corrected.

Tom looked again at the gardener, but before he could speak Mrs. Trent broke in. "If anyone is guilty of a crime, it is I. These others"—she included the whole room with the wave of her hand—"have acted only to spare me."

Tom said, "Please, Mrs. Trent." She covered her face with her hands and was silent.

Tom spoke to the gardener, walking to within a few feet of him. "Do you deny that you went with Mrs. Trent to the pound this morning?"

There was a proud look on his face as he answered, "I don't deny it. I went there."

"And you struggled with Mr. Trent?" The man nodded without speaking.

Mrs. Trent said calmly, "The man is innocent. My husband was terribly angry at my interference. The gardener is a cripple. I was afraid Mr. Trent was killing him. I took off my shoe and struck my husband. I felt that I had to do it. He was not badly hurt, only dazed."

"Where was the dog?" Tom asked.

"He was in the gas box," Mrs. Trent replied. "I opened the door and let Ward out. He stepped on my foot as we ran up the stairs. It was then I must have lost the felt buckle."

"You didn't wait for Druid to join you?" Tom asked.

Mrs. Trent shook her head. "I meant to; then I saw Luke Blodgett coming down Carrol Road and I knew that Elmer would be all right. My husband, even in anger, could hardly hope to get the best of two men."

Tom again faced the gardener. "Do you want to add anything to

what Mrs. Trent has said?"

The man shook his head.

Tom said in annoyance, "Speak up, man, you're doing yourself more harm than good."

Druid drew a deep breath. "With a game leg I didn't have a chance to get away from him. While he was still addled, I pushed him in that box where the dog had been, and slammed the door."

"You didn't turn on the gas?"

"I didn't turn on nothing."

"Did you see Blodgett come in?"

"I heard him coming just as I got to the top of the stairs. There's a closet there. I ducked in that. When he had gone downstairs, I came out and started walking home."

Tom turned to Doc Madden. "Does that sound reasonable to you?"

Doc had been making notes. "So far," he said.

Tom looked at Luke Blodgett. "Luke," he said, "you were out cleaning the pens in the yard just before noon, is that right?"

"You know it's right," Luke said doggedly.

"And Mr. Trent came and told you he had put a dog in the gas chamber and wanted you to destroy it?"

Luke nodded.

"What did you tell him?"

"What could I tell him? It was his dog; his money built the pound. I told him I'd be right down."

"But you didn't go?"

"I started, and the phone rang. Some woman said there was a mad dog out on Easter Road. Mad dogs is dangerous. I got my net and gun, and lit out in the truck."

"You forgot about Mr. Trent waiting in the basement?"

"I didn't forget, I allowed he'd just have to wait."

"How long were you gone?"

"Fifteen, twenty minutes."

"You didn't find the dog?"

"No, I didn't find the dog," Luke said. "I got to worrying about Mr. Trent waiting, so after cruising around a little I went back to the pound."

"Go on," Tom commanded.

"Well, I done what he'd told me to do, I turned on the gas."

"Did you look to see if the dog was in there?"

"I didn't want to look; I didn't have to, I could hear him."

"Mr. Trent had ordered you to destroy the animal he had placed in the gas chamber, so you turned on the gas. Did you see anyone around the place?"

"I saw the Trent coupé pulling away as I drove up. I thought Mrs. Trent had come to drive her husband back. I turned on the gas, like I said; then I got to thinking about the mad dog again and went out to take another look. When I come back you and Ray and Doc Madden was there."

"Did you know that you had killed Mr. Trent?"

"I didn't know it," Luke said, "till you told me the dog was still alive. I thought first someone had taken out the dog and put Mr. Trent in."

Tom looked at Doc Madden, then at me. "Only one thing," Doc Madden said. "Who made the call about the mad dog?"

Tom turned to Mrs. Knox. "I did, doctor," she said. "I didn't think anyone else would be able to work the valves but Luke Blodgett. I wanted to get him out of the way long enough to let Mrs. Trent and Elmer get there."

Tom looked at me, a smile of satisfaction on his face. "The inquest will be at ten tomorrow morning. I'll expect you all there, or does someone want a summons?"

There was no answer. Tom opened the door. Mrs. Trent crossed the room and stood looking from one to the other of us. "I can't say anything," she said, her voice low, "but thank you all."

THE END.



CLUES TO CHARACTER

As Shown in Handwriting

BY NAIJA ANDREYEFF

How well do you know yourself? How well do you know others? Here is a medium to help you gain knowledge of human nature. Knowing how to analyze character from handwriting will enable you to make your contacts with people pleasant and interesting. You can easily learn handwriting analysis in a practical and logical way by studying the following article. Other articles on this fascinating subject will appear every month in the pages of this magazine.

There is a wealth of information about you shown by just one single stroke of your pen. Remember the old school rule about dotting your i's and crossing your t's? It is surprising how the t bars you make give you away.

In analyzing handwriting, the t bar is one of the most vital clues to character and disposition. It clearly shows if you are self-reliant and determined to get ahead under your own steam, or if you are changeable and undecided and let others push you around.

When you come across handwriting in which the t bars are not at all effective, that is, if they are small and weak-looking, you may be sure that the person who makes them has no strong opinions, allows himself to be persuaded too easily—often against his own will—and it is hard for him to make up his mind about things. The only time this rule varies is when the rest of the handwriting shows force and strength, indicating that the person may be weak in some instances and quite strong in others. These people often give the impression that they are unbending, never change and never give in, but they do change and unbend and give in, when it suits their purpose or their fancy.

Another thing about people who make small, weak t bars is that they rarely gush, or make overtures, or go out of their way to be friendly. Perhaps because they are timid. But once they become acquainted, or if someone else seeks them out, they may be quite sociable.

The t bars you make are also keys to your temperament. They show

whether you are amiable and reasonable, or if you allow your weaker traits to get the upper hand. How, then, do *you* cross your t's?

If t bars have an upward slant and are placed well over the letter (A) they show enthusiasm and an active

Character
Through

Team
(A)

imagination. And when the writing leans to the right, letter forms are rounded or partly rounded, and the pen pressure even and medium, the writer is a friendly person who likes people. Humanity in general interests him. In affections and in friendships he will be warmhearted and doesn't hesitate to show it. If the writing is upright, these traits are curbed to some extent. (See article on the angle of inclination in the March, 1942, issue of Detective Story Magazine.) Up-slanted t bars show cheerfulness and optimism. You can't down a person who is determined to keep the bright side up.

Many people make their t bars in a more-or-less similar manner. That is, the t bars are of medium length and placed halfway through the letter. In the average handwriting (B) this t bar reflects a pliant make-up and a personality lacking high lights.

Thought
that wanted
(B)

This does not mean that people who make this t bar are to be looked down on. They are methodical, careful, dependable, have a mild disposition and are easy to get along with. In most cases, when other signs confirm it, they are hard workers and have sufficient will power to carry out their duties. After all, all sorts of smaller cogs are needed to keep the wheels of life turning.

The matter-of-fact, sensible t bar (C) is also found in many handwritings. It shows good sense, determination, ability to make decisions and to stick to them.

stamped
ate
(C)

People who make these t bars are not without imagination, and they know their own minds. When the writing is angular or semiangular and loops of letters like l, k, h, are high, they have the ability to grasp facts quickly and are far from being backward. If the writing leans to the left, however, they are not such good mixers. But these sensible t bars show the writer to be good-natured and logical, and if he says he will do a thing, you may depend on it.

Since t bars show at a glance whether a person gets along well with others or allows trivialities to irk him, it is easy to spot the t bar that shows quick temper and the tendency to be domineering.

cannot tell
(D)

The downward, daggerlike slash

(D) shows unconcealed sarcasm and often an acid tongue, and the writer makes no bones about what he wants, nor does he care how he gets what he wants. He wants his own way at all times and has small regard for others. The temper is explosive, though not lasting, there is selfishness, often brutality in some form or other, and much personal conceit. Even when the writing shows basic intelligence, the personality is not really strong, though it may appear to be so because the makers of such t bars are apt to be sly and cunning.

Often we find t bars that run straight across the letter but which are also inclined to be spear-shaped

The bowl-like t bar (G) is an interesting formation. If it is made like a turned-up bow, and if used throughout the writing, it shows a

appreciate
right at
(G)

rather weak-willed person who, although charming and likable, has shallow interests and is too easily influenced and led by others. He rarely makes the effort that wins

intently received upon
deliberate at the time
stop that
(E)

(E). These show hot temper, sarcasm, a desire to domineer, but the argumentative streak is not so evident as in (C). The reverse of the spear-shaped t bar (F) also shows

him his place in the sun.

The curved t bar that resembles a turned-down bow (H) shows an

obtained
timely
(F)

intensity of feeling as well as quick temper, but these traits are curbed, and some effort is made to keep them under control. The makers of (F) bars are more cautious and stop to think now and then.

either or not
(H)

entirely different character. Wherever it appears, it shows that the writer has learned, or is learning, to overcome his weak points, and does not easily give way to his weaknesses.

Do you know anyone who has a vivacious, often arresting personality, who is brimming over with vitality and apparently has the ability to do big things—and yet never actually gets anywhere worth men-

tioning? If you wonder why, take a look at his handwriting. You may find that the t bar, either long or short, is wavy (I). This shows in-

be tempted to take a look at your own handwriting and find that your t bars are sort of looped-over affairs. They may not appear important or

*To tell
together
to stay*
(I)

decision, a changeable attitude, flightiness of purpose and no real desire to shoulder serious responsibilities.

There is another t bar that shows why a person fails to make the most of himself, and that is the long, thin crossing of the t (J). The pen pressure in the rest of the writing may be firm enough and the letter forms may show intelligence and other good traits, and often real talent, but the spidery t bars spoil it all. The enthusiasm is there, but the determination to really put the shoulder to the wheel is missing.

that
(J)

This long, thin t bar is just as ineffective as very short t bars or no t bars at all. At this point you may

impressive, and yet you are not doing so badly. How come? Looped-over t bars (K) show persistence and ability to keep the nose to the grindstone, and plug away at one thing at a time—unless you find the time to do more than one thing. Others may manage to make more

Do you that
(K)

spectacular efforts, but you get there just the same. You have strong convictions and stand up for them in your own individual way.

People who are plagued by hesitation and over-cautiousness, who can't make up their minds and are suspicious, invariably fail to cross their t's (L). They somehow never accomplish what they want. It isn't always because they are downright lazy, either.

that this well
(L)

If the writing is of ordinary pen pressure, they may hesitate to get busy if the deal involves others because they hate to do anything that is disagreeable to others or to themselves. If the writing is of very light pressure, they have every intention to use elbow grease and accomplish things, but somehow they just don't get started.

Lack of patience is shown by t bars that are placed after the letter (M). Makers of these t bars may be ambitious and enthusiastic, but they are often quick-tempered and

(O)

bound to argue to gain his point. Hooks also show tenacity of purpose. When these people get an idea into their heads, just try to knock it out! And when they start

(M)

irritable. They are far from being weak-willed, however, and manage to accomplish much.

Strength of will power and determination is shown in the long, positive t bar, especially when the letters are well proportioned (N). If capitals are large, some executive ability is evident. Long t bars show mental vitality and activity, and a liking for physical activity.

something, they want to know what the finish will be like.

Last but not least, there is another important thing to remember about t bars. No one uses exactly the same t crossings on all the t's he makes. We all possess more than one characteristic, and there are many sides to our natures. Most of us use a variety of t bars. Therefore, we should pick out the t bars

(N)

Hooks on the ends of t bars (O) are also an interesting sign. The writer who makes these hooks may appear very good-natured, but he's

that occur most frequently in the handwriting, and apply the accompanying traits when making the analysis.

THE END.



COP WITH AN EAR

by LAWRENCE TREAT

Patrolman Ernest Mathews' taste for music didn't have any tendency to dull his scent for crime detection.

Patrolman Ernest Mathews sat in the concert hall and fidgeted. He knew something was wrong. He could tell it by the way the members of the orchestra hurried in, with a glance at the audience, and then fell to whispering among themselves.

He thought of getting up and going backstage to find out the trouble, but he didn't. He just sat and wondered, hunched his burly shoulders and stared down at his big, meaty hands. Butcher hands, they seemed, but they weren't. They were strong and supple, with the delicate touch of a fiddler.

He watched Andy Markhof and Joe Bordini march in and sit down behind the woodwind section. They fussed over their big French horns and then leaned forward. One of the trumpeters shook his head and pursed his lips. Something was up, all right.

Mat always hated these few minutes before the concert started, be-

cause they made him think. He'd started life as a musician. Maybe he should have stuck to it. He'd have been sitting up there, with a black silk scarf tucked on his shoulder and his fiddle resting easily on his lap. He'd be lifting it up now, listening to the string and finding it a trifle off. He'd be up there with the strains of the overture running through his head, and his thick lips barely smiling. He'd be thinking of Olga, maybe.

He didn't think of her often, these days. He'd pushed her out of his mind and she only came back occasionally, when he was playing in his room at night. Alone. Always alone.

Mat stared at the program. Music and crime. They didn't mix, he supposed. That was why he was still a patrolman after ten years. His spare time and his extra energy went into his music. He led the police band, and it was a good one. But all he

could do with it was pound out marches. Brass and drums, mostly. Noise and fury.

When he'd first told his old friends, musicians who'd studied with him and whose names were listed on the program lying now in his lap, that he was conducting the police band and was going to make something of it, they'd laughed at him. But he didn't care. He'd joined the force because he'd figured it would give him security, and leisure to play his fiddle.

He cleared his throat and wondered why Lewis Bagby wasn't on the platform. Then Mat shook his head. He ought at least to be honest with himself. He'd joined the cops for one reason, and only one. Olga. He'd been ashamed to ask her to marry a musician without a job, with nothing ahead of him except maybe a WPA handout. But if he was a cop, with a steady salary—

Somebody strode across the stage and approached the loud-speaker. The audience murmured and grew quiet. It sensed the unusual in the announcement. "Ladies and gentlemen, due to an unforeseen accident, Mr. Panachewski will not be able to conduct this afternoon. His place will be taken by Mr. Lewis Bagby, assistant conductor. We regret the slight delay that has been occasioned you."

So that was it. Something had happened to Panachewski, and Lewis was taking over. Mat stiffened, and then he told himself that, no matter what he thought of Lewis, this was a break for Olga. Because Olga was Mrs. Lewis Bagby.

It was a long time since Mat had seen her. Only twice in the last ten years. Once, when she'd sat tight-lipped and white-faced and silent while Bagby told Mat to stay away, that his wife didn't care to see Mat,

and again the following day when Olga had waited for him on the street and apologized. And explained that she wasn't the kind to leave her husband just when the going got tough.

Mat had made no further attempt to see her. But through her brother, Andy Markhof, Mat followed the Bagby fortunes. Or misfortunes. Lewis' bright hopes had slipped away. Those were depression days, and he had lost his place with the orchestra and lost most of his pupils, too. People couldn't afford to pay for high-priced lessons.

Then Lewis had got a job with a WPA orchestra. Mat came around and asked him whether he'd like to borrow money. Lewis had glared and nodded, and for the next three years Mat had practically supported the Bagbys. In a way, that had been the happiest time of his life. Bagby growled and insulted him and took his money, but Mat knew he was making things easier for Olga. He'd given up music so that she'd have some security. Things hadn't worked out the way Mat had planned, but he was accomplishing his main objective. And he was relatively content.

For a while, Mat kept up with his old friends. Andy Markhof came around evenings and helped Mat with the scores for the police band. The two men hunched over their music for hours, with a glass of beer in front of each of them and a few extra cans in the icebox. They never mentioned Olga, but, somehow, she was always with them. Olga and music. They were the only important things in Mat's life.

Then Lewis Bagby got his job back with the orchestra. Andy brought word of it. "He says I should tell you, and that he doesn't want to see you any more. I don't

know what he meant, Mat, but I guess you do."

"Yeah," said Mat slowly. Lewis was making money again and didn't have to borrow. Mat's last tie with Olga was cut.

It made a difference between him and Andy, too. Mat never knew just how it came about, but Andy stopped coming over of a free evening, and Mat lost the habit of going backstage at the concerts.

He still attended them, of course. He couldn't do without a good symphony. But he always felt bitter and jealous and unwanted, while he waited for the opening number. Then the music would get him and sweep him away, and at the end he'd trudge out, lost in his dreams.

He rarely thought of Olga, but when he did, a new and horrible idea came into his mind. That somehow, it had all been a misunderstanding. Olga might have thought he was selling out his talents, when he'd joined the force. He'd never told her he'd done it for her sake. He'd thought that she'd know.

Well, it was too late now. And Lewis was coming up in the world. He'd always been a first-rate musician and now he'd been made an assistant conductor. He'd have been more than that if he'd been able to get along with people. But he was proud and sharp and overbearing, and he hadn't the knack of drawing emotion out of his orchestra. They resented him, and their resentment was all too apparent.

Mat watched him stride out onto the platform. A tall, handsome figure, confident of himself and winning over the audience with his easy, graceful stride. He bowed smilingly, tapped his baton for silence and raised his arm. This was his big chance, and he intended to make good.

And the orchestra laid down on him. They sabotaged him the way the Norwegians tricked the Nazis. They slowed him, and as soon as he slowed, too, they speeded up and left him behind. The horn was sour and the strings were ragged and the tympanist came in a half beat late. They committed mayhem on Weber, and when they got around to Beethoven, they murdered him.

That was too much for Mat. In the middle of it, he got up and walked out. He slogged down the aisle, with his feet heavy and his neck bowed. He was thinking of Olga.

Out in the lobby, he looked up. A couple of the boys were standing at the exit doors and Mat nodded to them. "What are you doing here?" he asked. "Going in for music these days?"

Scanlon, who'd been yanked off his traffic beat, looked surprised. "Haven't you heard? They got Panachewski."

"Huh?"

"Plugged him in his dressing room, just before the concert started."

So that was it. Murder! Somebody'd killed Panachewski. No wonder the orchestra had been all off. Panachewski, the best known and probably the best liked conductor in the country. Well, at least the boys hadn't deliberately laid down on Bagby. Though Mat still thought he wouldn't have fallen apart the way this gang had.

"I think I'll take a look in back," he murmured. He wasn't a homicide man and he was off duty and he had only a patrolman's ranking but, when they shot a good musician, it was personal to Mat.

He marched down a long corridor and found a cop guarding the door backstage. Mat didn't know him,

but he showed his badge and passed through.

In the wings, there was apparent confusion. A homicide detail was at work under Inspector Kraft, and they were looking for fingerprints, taking photographs and questioning a handful of scared employees. Mat leaned against a wall and thought of the sour note with which the overture had opened. It worried him.

Nobody paid any attention to Mat. He wandered around, feeling like a musician among the cops and like a cop among the musicians. He headed for the lavatory. The rest room was at the left, a big concrete chamber without enough heat or enough rugs. The place had always been cold. They hadn't fixed it up, either, in all these years.

Dimly, from the distance, he heard the strains of the Beethoven building up to a crescendo. He strolled back to the wings, where Kraft was still busy. The symphony ended, Bagby appeared momentarily and wiped his forehead. He ducked out almost immediately, but the applause was only mild. He returned, and then the orchestra followed him.

Mat still kept to himself, watching and wondering. The cops herded the musicians into a corner and Inspector Kraft addressed them. Quietly, amiably, he asked for their co-operation. His only interest was the same as theirs—to find the criminal. It would help immeasurably if they permitted themselves to be searched. There was no trace of a gun, and the chances were that the murderer still had the weapon on his person.

For a moment there was silence. Then Andy Markof stepped forward. The light seemed to bounce off his dark, curly hair, and his long chin jutted forward aggressively. But

his voice was matter-of-fact.

"What you ask is impossible," he said. "We know our rights. We're sufficiently upset already, and we propose to rest during the intermission. As for being searched, it is an outrage!"

A murmur of approval followed his words. Kraft nodded curtly to a cop. The members of the orchestra filed through to the rest rooms.

Kraft bit his lips. His glance shifted and rested on Mat. "Who are you?" demanded the inspector.

Mat came forward slowly. Broad, heavy-set, with serious gray eyes and too much weight in his shoulders, he looked tired and out of place.

"Patrolman Mathews," he said. "I was in the audience. When I heard what happened, I came in here."

"Got anything to tell us? If not—" Then Kraft stopped himself. "A cop at a concert, huh? You conduct the police band, don't you?"

Mathews nodded, and Kraft went on thoughtfully. He must have been pretty much up in the air to bother telling anything to an ordinary patrolman.

"They got him five or ten minutes before the performance," said Kraft. "He always went into a little dressing room off this corridor behind me and stayed there alone till it was time to go on. Everybody knew that. Door was closed, but it wasn't locked. Musicians passing by all the time, on their way from the lounge to the lavatory. Anyone of them could have stepped in for a few seconds, shot him and come out. Easy. Twelve of the orchestra admit going to the lavatory. The other seventy—maybe they did and maybe they didn't."

Kraft frowned, and then, suddenly, he got mad. "Well?" he snapped. "What am I wasting time on you for? Got any ideas?"

Mat took a long time to answer. "Maybe," he finally said. "Maybe I have. Got a program?"

Kraft picked one up from a table. "What do you want with it?"

Mat turned it over and studied the names of the musicians printed on the back of the last page. They were listed under their instruments.

He took a pencil from his pocket, and then he hesitated. Suppose he was wrong—then what? And how about Olga? She was slipping back into his life now. Somebody would say to her, "A cop by the name of Mathews. Ernest Mathews. He's responsible."

Olga. And on the other side of the ledger, the dead Panachewski. And Mat's duty as a cop. He closed his eyes momentarily. He felt tired, his muscles ached as if he'd been out all night in heavy weather. Maybe he was wrong, too. After all, he was just guessing.

Slowly, he lifted the pencil and drew a circle around the four names listed under the French horn. A. Markhof, J. Bordini—

"One of them," said Mat quietly. "One of those four."

Kraft snapped "Which? How do you know?"

"I don't know. Just something I noticed, while I was out there listening. I may be wrong, but I don't think so."

"What are you trying to do? Pull a miracle?"

"Try the paraffin test," said Mat. "It's got to be one of them."

"How do you know?"

Mat shrugged. He felt foolish as he gave his reason. In his mind it had seemed so clear, but in words, it sounded feeble.

"The French horn," he said, "was off pitch. The cold air from a place like that lounge will do it, unless you warm up the instrument. It's

second nature to warm it up, and the four of them were on the platform in plenty of time to do it. But one of those horns was cold and sounded off pitch. I don't know which, but I do know that whoever forgot was so rattled that—"

"That he must have committed a murder? A guy plays a false note and so you accuse him, huh?"

"It wasn't a false note. He simply forgot to warm up his horn. It's as impossible as forgetting your badge when you go on duty. You'll have plenty of time to check up on the horns. The next number's a Scarlatti piece, scored for strings only."

He ambled away and sat down. A bell rang. He watched Kraft give his orders. Mat heard the word paraffin. He sat there without moving. Andy Markof was one of the horns, and Andy had objected to the search. Was he going to submit to the paraffin test?

The musicians began filing back into the hall. A few of them nodded to Mat. Absently he returned the greeting. Why would Andy want to kill Panachewski?

There might be any number of reasons. A woman, maybe. Panachewski was known for that kind of thing. When it came to women, he had no conscience and no morals. More than one man was glad the conductor was dead.

A couple of detectives crossed the wing and entered an anteroom. They were carrying equipment for the paraffin test. Mat watched the closed door behind which they had disappeared. He didn't move. He'd gotten Andy into this thing. He wondered how he'd get him out. Because Mat knew that, if Olga came to him, he'd hand in his shield and do everything in the world to clear Andy. Whether Andy Mark-

hof was guilty or innocent, all Olga had to do was ask. Because the security of a police salary was no longer of use to her.

The door opened and a detective looked at Mat. "Come on in, Mathews. Inspector wants you."

Mat walked in. A detective was heating the paraffin in a small bowl. Somebody else was mixing chemicals in a glass container.

Kraft said sharply, "Mathews!"

Mat halted and looked at him. Kraft's sharp brown eyes were glittering lancets. The cold, merciless efficiency of the man needled into Mat's forehead and pressed at his brain. He said, "Yes?"

"I'm taking a chance on this hunch of yours. You know music, and I don't. If you're right, you'll get proper credit. If you're wrong, God help you. I don't like to be made a fool of."

Maybe it would be one of the others. Andy was only one of four. But those off-pitch notes, the cold horn—Mat felt he had something there. When he thought it out, his theory seemed full of holes. But this wasn't something he'd doped out in his mind; it was a fact that he'd sensed with his whole body.

"Go ahead with the test," said Mat steadily. "You'll uncover something."

Kraft said "All right. Bring them in."

Mat stood to one side. He was familiar with the process. You pour the melted paraffin over the suspect's hands and fingers. The heat of the paraffin causes sweating and the pores empty themselves on the wax. Then it's stripped from the hand and put into the chemical mixture. The paraffin presents a white, spotless surface. But if a revolver has been fired recently, the nitrates in the gas have saturated the skin and are

drawn out and appear as small, bright blue spots on the paraffin.

Kraft kept glowering and Mat stood there silently, busy with his own thoughts. Then the door opened and the four men were brought in.

Joe Bordini stopped when he saw Mat. The musician nodded briefly. "Hello," he said.

Mat's voice rumbled in answer, but he was looking at Andy. Andy's eyes were questioning, but neither of the two old friends spoke. They were on opposite sides tonight. No need to pretend otherwise. And yet, wordless, they understood each other. Mat gulped. He'd been right, after all.

Kraft explained what he wanted. He gave no reasons. He simply asked them to submit to the test.

While the inspector spoke, Andy kept watching Mat. Mat averted his eyes. The remembrance of Olga had entered the room and now everything was mixed up.

As soon as Kraft had finished, Andy objected. "I refuse to go through with this, inspector."

Kraft turned on him. "You're the man who didn't want to be searched before, aren't you?"

"I know my rights."

Kraft's voice came cold, incisive, with that ruthless quality that stabbed into you. "What's your name?"

"Markhof."

"You can refuse, if you like, but let me explain the alternative. You'll be held for questioning. The questioning will be long and tough. We have information, and in time you'll find out what it is. But believe me, you'll be much happier if you go through with this."

It was queer how Mat seemed to sense what was happening inside his friend. The sharp, cutting threat

numbing Andy's mind, his hesitation while he weighed the chances, and then his decision. The only thing Mat didn't know was Andy's reason.

"All right," he said. "Go ahead with it."

Joe Bordini was first. He smiled and watched the process closely. Kraft peeled off the paraffin and dipped it in the solution. It came out pure white. "O. K.," he said. "Beat it."

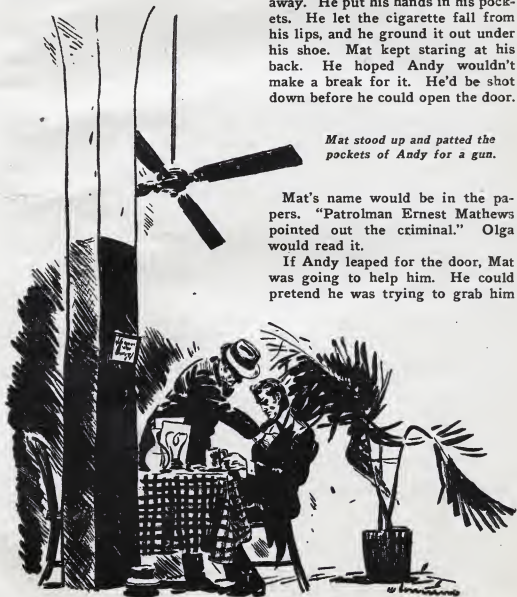
Puccelli followed. He looked worried and his forehead was creased like worn leather. Mat looked at Andy. Andy lit a cigarette. He began to sweat on his upper lip. When he puffed, he wiped away the sweat and tried to look as if he hadn't.

Puccelli was cleared and left the room. Andy started to speak as Puccelli walked by, but the Italian didn't hear him. Andy was conscious of Mat's glance. Andy turned away. He put his hands in his pockets. He let the cigarette fall from his lips, and he ground it out under his shoe. Mat kept staring at his back. He hoped Andy wouldn't make a break for it. He'd be shot down before he could open the door.

Mat stood up and patted the pockets of Andy for a gun.

Mat's name would be in the papers. "Patrolman Ernest Mathews pointed out the criminal." Olga would read it.

If Andy leaped for the door, Mat was going to help him. He could pretend he was trying to grab him



and instead, Mat could get in the way. Nobody'd know.

The third horn-player turned around and smiled as Kraft looked at the paraffin and said "All right, you're clear. Markhof—next!"

Andy turned. He looked feverish and his eyes were shining. There was something behind this that Mat hadn't fathomed. He began turning over other possible motives. He wondered whether he'd have to question Olga. He wished he'd never come backstage. He wished his ear hadn't been so keen and delicate that he could pick out a false note from the horns. Maybe nobody else in the whole audience had noticed.

Andy was holding his hands in front of him. They were coated with paraffin, and they were trembling. Kraft was waiting for the stuff to cool. He glanced at Mat and half nodded. This was it!

Mat moved forward tensely and watched while Kraft stripped off the paraffin and dipped it in the glass bowl. Andy started to slip away. A detective caught his arm and held him. Mat licked his lips. He thought of the long hours he and Andy had sipped their beer and gone over the music scores, occasionally arguing over one of Mat's ideas. Those had been good days. Andy near him, Mat working and knowing that Olga was having an easier time because of him.

Kraft picked the strips of paraffin from the bowl and held them up. They were pure white.

Andy smiled. "I can go now, inspector?"

Kraft looked at Mat; Mat looked away. The inspector said, "Yes. You can go."

Mat waited for the footsteps to recede and the door to close. Then he turned and started to follow.

Kraft's voice snapped out in hard

anger. "Mathews!"

Mat halted and didn't turn. Kraft said, "You made a fool of me. And I'm not forgetting it!"

Mat waited, still without turning. Then he kept on going, heavily and wearily. Kraft had a reputation in the department. He got results, but he also "got" anybody he didn't like. Mat wondered when the blow would hit him, and how.

But curiously, now that the paraffin test had failed, Mat was certain that, somehow, he'd been right. The unspoken exchange with Andy—it meant something. But what?

Mat strode to the stage exit and waited. The concert was over. The musicians filed out, discussing the cause. A few of them looked at Mat. A couple of them said, "hello." He muttered in answer. His mind felt doped up and confused. The band of his hat pressed heavily against his head.

When Andy came out, Mat looked up. "Let's have a cup of coffee," he said.

Andy shrugged. "If we have to."

They walked in silence, a heavy-set man and a dark, dreamy-looking man. They turned the corner and entered the small restaurant where they'd gone so many times in the old days. They took a table at the rear and sat opposite each other.

"What are you holding out?" asked Mat suddenly.

Markhof shook his head and didn't answer.

"You've got that gun!" snapped Mat.

"I have no gun. Search me, if you want."

"I'll do just that!" Mat stood up and patted Andy's pockets and chest and back and armpits. He even stooped to make sure Andy didn't have a gun concealed on his leg. Then Mat sat down.

They drank their coffee without speaking. When they had finished, Markhof got up. Mat reached out and took the check.

He watched Andy stride toward the entrance. Mat felt tired and beaten. He was a musician and not a cop, and the two didn't mix. It was a bitter admission to make. He'd put more into police work than he cared to admit. Ten years of it. If he wasn't a cop now, if the traditions of the department weren't as much a part of him as his fiddle, then he wouldn't have gone after Andy the way he had. Because, from the very beginning, from the first flash of intuition, he'd known the trail would bring him straight to Andy. And Olga.

Well, did a cop give up, or did a cop follow the pattern to the end, regardless of who stood in the way?

Mat's chin went up and there was spring and vigor in his step as he reached the street. He was just in time to see Andy climb into a cab and shoot toward the avenue. Mat broke into laughter. He hailed another taxi and ordered it to follow.

Apparently, Andy never even dreamed he was being shadowed. He was that kind. A musician.

Andy still lived uptown, but the cab took him in the opposite direction. Mat leaned forward and watched it, speeding through the scattered traffic half a block ahead. On Eighteenth Street it turned east and stopped halfway down the block.

Mat watched Andy enter the second in a row of small apartment houses. The cop gave his friend time to get inside, and then he followed. The downstairs door was locked, but a row of bells, with name plates above them, showed an easy way to get in. Mat pushed five bells at once.

When the buzzer-release sounded,

DS—9E

he pushed the door and stepped inside. And that was as far as he got.

The blow caught him on the skull and he flopped forward. It descended out of the darkness and he saw nothing. Nor did he have to. Minutes later, when he came to, his first thought was that Andy had deliberately tricked him, had entered by the same ruse and had simply waited. And then put Mat out of action.

Mat's second thought was that his hat had saved him. He saw a kid's baseball bat lying in the lobby. Andy must have picked it up and socked him with it. You can kill a man that way. But sometimes his hat saves him.

Groggily, Mat got to his feet. There were only two possible places to go. To Andy's apartment, or to the Bagbys. He went to the Bagbys.

He showed his badge and then he described Andy, and the doorman told him he was right. Andy had arrived about five minutes ago.

Mat got off at the eleventh floor. He was scared now. In the last ten years he'd broken up a few fights and arrested a number of belligerent drunks, and twice he'd exchanged shots with an escaping gunman. He'd walked into dark hallways when he didn't know what lay ahead, and he'd climbed roofs and he'd performed a couple of stunts that would have rated a bonus in any other line of work. But he'd never been scared the way he was now. Because he was about to face Olga.

He stopped at the door and swallowed. He had no idea what he was going to do or say or ask. He couldn't walk in and accuse Andy of complicity of a murder, especially after a police inspector had done his best to involve him, and had failed.

He stood there and tried to figure

his play, and his mind was a blank. What if Lewis Bagby opened the door and refused him admission?

Mat heard voices inside. First, a mumble, an angry oath and then a woman's shriek, sharp and hysterical and curdling his blood. The fright left him, and for an instant he wondered how he was going to get through a locked steel door in time to prevent whatever was happening inside.

Then he recalled, back through the years, one of Olga's crazy-little habits. She never locked doors because she never could remember to carry a key. Mat used to scold her for it, but he'd never made much impression.

He put his hand on the knob and turned it. The door opened. He charged in, and then he had his gun in his hand and was firing at the living-room ceiling.

At the shot, they turned for a single panicky instant and Mat saw all three of them clearly. The blond woman on the floor, with her arms clutched around a trouser leg. A strangely familiar blond woman, with her eyes wide and half twisted out of their sockets and her mouth open with a shriek that still echoed in the room. Andy, cringing behind a chair, with his glasses knocked off and his hand raised across his forehead, as if he could protect himself and stop bullets with his fingers. And the third man, Lewis Bagby. He stood there in his cutaway, holding the gun and pointing it at Andy.

Mat charged like a bull and the gun circled and spat. He dived under it and Olga screamed again and tugged at Bagby's leg. The shots went wide, what with her clawing and Mat's weaving, ducking charge.

Then Mat made contact with a wild, hurtling lunge.

Bagby staggered back and Mat got his hand on the gun and twisted savagely. The gun came loose and Bagby thumped against the wall and started to topple. Mat finished him with a dull, heavy punch that carried more weight than speed. But it landed solid and Bagby went down. And stayed down.

When Inspector Kraft arrived, Mat opened the door. Kraft said coldly, "You, huh? I thought you'd quit."

Mat shook his head. "I knew I couldn't be wrong. If Markhof hadn't done it, he knew who had. He'd seen Bagby come out of Panachewski's dressing room, but Markhof didn't want to accuse him until he was sure. His own brother-in-law—he couldn't simply turn him over to the police without a chance to explain. Actually, Bagby had the gun the entire time. Kept it in the tail of his cutaway.

"When Markhof got here and made his accusation, Bagby lost his head and was about to shoot him."

"And Bagby's motive?"

"Two of them. He wanted Panachewski out of the way so that he himself would have a chance to conduct, and Panachewski had been making advances to Mrs. Bagby, which Bagby stupidly thought were successful."

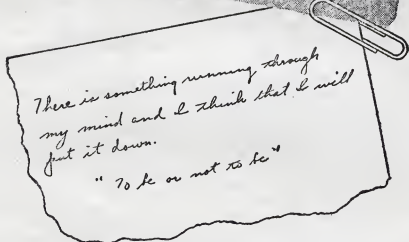
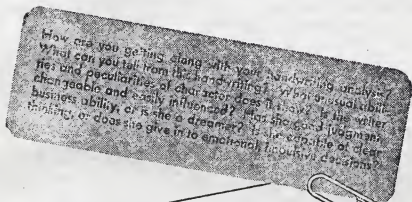
"Why stupidly?" asked Kraft.

"Because," said Mat, "it seems that she was really in love with somebody else. Had been for the last ten years. I just found out for sure."

He glanced across the room at Olga, and she smiled at him. He told himself that if he'd been any kind of a detective, he'd have detected this ten years ago.

THE END.

CHARACTER QUIZ



If your handwriting is neat, uniform and of average letter formations, and on the small side so far as size is concerned, then very likely you have patience for routine and detail work, as has the writer of this sample.

Here we see no unusual quirks of temperament, but neither is the dis-

position altogether meek and mild. The writing is of moderate size, the small letters well made, the a's and o's closed, the pen pressure even and not too heavy, and the capitals not outstanding. All this adds up to the fact that although the writer—a young lady employed as a secretary—is not dominated by driving ambi-

tion, she is reliable, matter-of-fact in her undertakings, careful and dependable in carrying out her employer's orders.

The variable T bars show that she may often be bored, uncertain, even hard to please; her dislikes and likes may come and go, but the moderate size and even letter forms show a pleasant, likable personality. She may appear to be unassertive, but in her own way she will ultimately find her own definite place in life.

The rather unusual formation of the capital letter I has almost the appearance of Q or the number 2 in compressed form, and shows that this young lady is inclined to live a great deal within herself, and is rather "touchy" at times. She has her own ideas about the way she wants to manage her life, and it irks her when those who are closely associated with her criticize her or think she should change her views.

Loops in handwriting, either in the capital or in small letters, below or above the line of writing, always give us an interesting insight into a person's make-up. These loops, particularly in the capital letters I, R, M, P, D, L, and B, and in the small letters j, y, g, p, l, h, show to a great extent to what degree a person's ego, aspirations, ambitions and materialistic inclinations are developed. But in order to make an accurate deduction other indications in the handwriting must also be considered.

As a general rule, however, loops above the line of writing that are out

of proportion with other letter formations are evidence that the writer is reaching out for something. What that something is remains to be determined by other pen strokes. For instance, if the pen pressure is heavy and uneven, the letters varied in size, and if the writing looks hurried and even disorderly, we have the person who is subject to impulsive actions, who may appear to be a go-getter, but who is principally interested in himself and his own comforts and enjoyments.

On the other hand, if the writing has good letter forms, is clear and uniform, and the pen pressure light or medium, the large loops mean that although the writer is proud and ambitious, there are spiritual qualities in his make-up, and if he is interested in personal gain he is also interested in bettering conditions for his fellow men. But let's get back to the sample at hand.

The moderate loops of the letters h and T, combined with i dots that are firm and placed at a fair distance from the letter, show good judgment in practical matters, coupled with some imagination. The moderate forward slant of the writing indicates that in affections this young woman is moderately ardent, and not greatly demonstrative, though as a general rule she is friendly and agreeable. Now and then there is an elimination of the return down stroke, as in the letter g in the word running, and this means that mental individuality is developing, as well as capacity for concentration.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

THE END.

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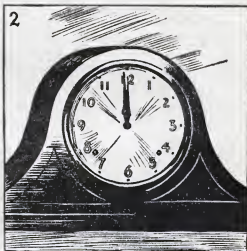
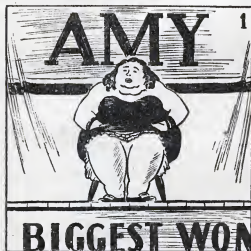
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TRAINING YOUR POWERS OF DEDUCTION

Each of the following pictures represents the name of something connected with crime. How many can you solve?



Turn to page 162 for answers

"MIND SPEEDERS" . . .

How fast can you think?

A What CAP— gives the orders on a vessel?

B What CAP— is often prescribed by a doctor?

C What CAP— is the seat of the government?

D What CAP— is dangerous in a small boat?

E What CAP— generally goes before small print?

F What CAP— means to surrender?

G What TRI— is feared by criminals?

H What TRI— is formed by three straight lines?

I What TRI— is popular with small children?

J What TRI— is used with cameras?

K What TRI— is of little value?

L What TRI— is an achievement of victory?

M What BLACK— makes a pleasant wine?

N What BLACK— is found in schools?

O What BLACK— is a dangerous weapon?

P What BLACK— signifies a negative vote?

Q What BLACK— is resorted to by criminals?

R What BLACK— is always around horses?



WHAT WAS THE JUDGE'S SENTENCE?

Take your pen or pencil and black out two squares on each row, from left to right. If you blacken the correct squares in each row, the remaining letters will spell out the judge's sentence.

F	I		L	O	V	E
A	D		R	A	Y	S
	T	I		N	O	
P		T	O		H	E
W	O	L		R	K	O
H	A	M	O	U	S	E

ANSWERS ON PAGE 162

DEATH GOES DANCING

A Novelette

by JOHN K. BUTLER

A boy and a girl. And a man who wanted the girl. And music and laughter—and murder.

I.

I sat there quite a while, watching them. This was a Sunday night, and less than a dozen couples remained in the marathon; their faces chalk under strong lights, stamped with hard lines of fatigue, and all of them about ready to drop in their tracks. The big crowded ballroom echoed from the rafters with the shouts and catcalls of spectators. It made you think of the gladiatorial contests of ancient Rome—hundreds of thrill-thirsty, decadent citizens cheering lustily for someone to die for them.

Of course, I only watched couple No. 13: Larry Gilroy and Loretta Ward. It didn't matter that others took part in the contest. To me, there was just Larry and Loretta—Larry because he was a charge of mine, a duty, and Loretta because she was a memory.

They came around the small square

dance floor wearily trying to conga with the enthusiastic beat of the music. You couldn't tell who would give out first, Larry or Loretta. They were alternately holding each other up, leaning on each other; ankles swollen to puffy thickness, feet leaden.

Then, over Larry's shoulder, Loretta saw me sitting there in the bleachers. Her lips smiled a little, but her eyes were deep and dazed; full of wonder, asking me the silent question: why am I doing this, Jack?

I lit a cigarette, and waved a hand to her, and wondered the same thing myself.

The first time I saw Larry Gilroy he was drunk outside a speak-easy over on Tenth Avenue. That was in Little Harlem. He'd slugged a patrolman, thrown a brick through a drugstore window, and I pinched

him myself that time, and sent him away in the Black Maria.

Then another time officers caught him in a grocery store stick-up, and still another time in a bank heist at Tenth and Morningside. He gave us nothing but trouble, and finally, I nabbed him for trying to peddle a bunch of wrist watches stolen from a jewelry-store window. That time, I sent him to the State pen, and he got three years of it.

I could never figure out how Loretta came to like him. She was much too swell a kid for him; a swell kid even back when we all went to school and I used to carry her books home in the afternoons. Smartest kid in the class. I never felt good enough for her myself. In fact, I can remember that night of the high-school dance, way back, when I stood outside with the other timid boys, smoking cigs in a bull session and not having the nerve to go in and ask Loretta to dance. I used to feel clumsy, awkward. The psychologists put a fancier name on it—inferiority complex.

In the years following graduation from school, I worked into the cops, went up through the rookie stage, and up to lieutenant on the pawnshop detail. That's when I arrested Larry Gilroy for the last time. Then, much later, I got a job with the State, as a parole officer.

I didn't see much of Loretta, though I thought about her a lot. A few times I took her out to a movie, but after a while she always had some other date, and after another while I didn't see her at all.

We lost complete track of each other.

Then one day I was sitting in the office, idly playing tiddlywinks with a pair of dimes on my desk blotter, when Larry Gilroy came in.

He'd just been paroled from prison

and had come straight to my office to report. He wore a shiny serge suit, a dead man's shirt, and twisted a ragged tweed cap in pale prison hands. The mark of stir was definitely upon him. But he had a glint of honesty in his eyes and a sincere tone to his voice.

"So you're a parole officer now, huh, Mr. McGregor?"

"That's right, Larry."

"I'm just out on that last rap. They tell me I got to report to you once a week. Every week for a year."

"That's to keep you on the straight-and-narrow, Larry. One little slip, and you go right back to the pen."

He glanced down at his shoes, the way they do when they've just come out. "You don't need to worry about that. I'm on the up-and-up now. Got a girl that's been waiting for me. We figure to get married."

"That's swell," I said. "Who is she?"

"Maybe you know her, at that. We all used to go to school when we were kids. Loretta Ward."

Loretta Ward!

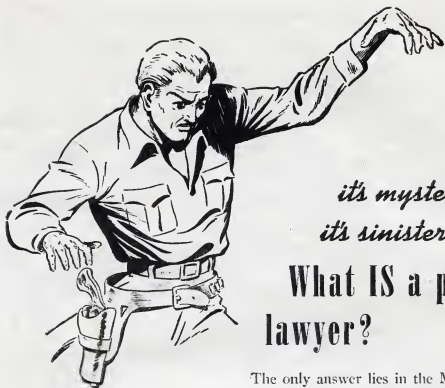
The touch of a feather would've knocked me backward off my chair, but I didn't let on.

"Loretta?" My voice sounded a little inane.

"Sure, Loretta. We plan to get married right after the dance marathon at the Paradise Ballroom. It starts March first. The winning couple gets a cash prize—a grand. And while you're in the contest, you get all your meals and clothes and stuff, and what money the audience throws on the floor. Loretta and me figure to win it. That gives us a good start in married life. Enough so I can wait to find a job."

I was thinking—thinking of the

Continued on page 141



*it's mysterious...
it's sinister...but*

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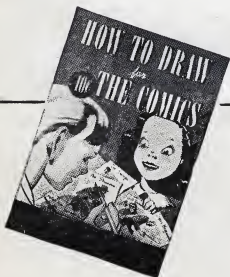
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Continued from page 138

way it used to be between Loretta and me. Thinking how things might have turned out, and didn't. Loretta, the girl I'd never felt good enough for. The girl who'd picked Larry out of all the world, who was going to "get a good start in married life." With Larry Gilroy.

"It sounds fine," I said emptily.

"Sure. But I got to ask you a favor, McGregor. I can't report to your office every week; not while I'm in the contest. Can't you keep tabs on me some other way?"

I decided to give him a break. When a guy like Larry—who always coasted through life on the softest, easiest, down-grade road—suddenly changes his pattern of living and enters a dance marathon, he must be soundly serious about reform. A marathon like that is the hardest kind of physical torture—for small and doubtful reward. It takes guts to enter it, particularly for an ex-con. And for a swell kid like Loretta—

"O. K.," I told him. "Forget about the parole reports. I'll keep tabs on you personally over at the ballroom. Best of luck. To both you and Loretta. I hope you win."

So that Sunday night, like many nights before it, I dropped in at the ballroom to watch them. The crowd was bigger than usual, because this was the forty-third day of the show and the fans anticipated action. Already the number of contestants had been cut down by hard physical exhaustion; one young woman, in fact, had died the week before of a strained heart. Less than a dozen couples still battled desperately to outstay each other for the grand prize.

I watched it for over an hour that

night, and the real trouble started at about nine.

The floor judge had just blown his whistle, calling the contestants back to the floor after a ten-minute sleep. They came out wearily from the dark, narrow corridor behind the orchestra platform. Some of the girls were asleep on their feet, their male partners gently slapping their cheeks to wake them.

I kept looking for Larry and Loretta, and they were such a long time appearing I was afraid the judge would disqualify them—if they returned at all.

I was really pulling for them. For Larry Gilroy and Loretta Ward. They could get off to a good start in marriage if they won this contest.

Phil Thorndike, the master of ceremonies, stepped from behind the black drapes and vaulted to the orchestra platform. He was a natty dresser, wore a fresh carnation in his lapel, and used perfume. In the tawdry surroundings of the show he stood out with honkatonk flash, like a circus Barker.

He snatched up a portable microphone, spoke into it with a happy, please-the-suckers smile, and his voice boomed down to us cordially from giant loud-speakers set in the rafters.

"All right, folks! Hold your hats, 'cause here we go again! Once again we have action in this great contest of skill and endurance! The kids are coming back on the floor for another round; this is the forty-third day of the Paradise Dance Marathon, and *anything* can happen! We got nine couples left, and one single, in this great contest. The single is that fine lad, Ben West, and he needs a partner. Maybe one of the other boys will drop out during the sprints and Ben can pick up a partner. Ben's got till midnight to pick up a part-

ner; otherwise, the floor judge will be forced to rule Ben West out of the contest.

"This is a great show, folks. Come often, and tell your friends. Only two bits a ticket on the day, only forty cents at night. Always your money's worth at this gigantic, spectacular, thrill-a-minute contest—at the wonderful Paradise Ballroom!" He started to stamp the platform with his well-shod left foot. "All right, folks! Let's give the kids a big hand." Applause clattered through the ballroom, and the master of ceremonies turned to the orchestra. "Music, boys! Let there be music! Let's go, now! On with the dance!"

Naturally, I had eyes on the dim corridor, waiting for couple No. 13. And they came out only a few seconds before the floor judge again blew his whistle, signifying that all contestants must be on the floor.

Larry Gilroy looked weaker than ever, leaning his full weight on his partner. Loretta had all she could do to hold him up; his head wobbled; his eyes were dazed, sick; his shoes leaden.

The music blared, and all the couples tried to dance, but it was only Larry who seemed to be failing at it. Once he slipped, trying to rumba, and the crowd let out a shriek of excitement as he went down on one knee and the floor judge began to count over him, like the referee in a fight ring swinging one arm toward the fatal count of ten.

And I sat there and squirmed, like a spectator at a fight who wants to see his man win, but sees him on the floor, glassy-eyed, with the count being tolled over him. My heart was beating fast.

Phil Thorndike vaulted down from the orchestra platform. The portable microphone was still in his

hands; it came away with him on a long cable, and his tough cordial voice, like a circus spieler's, still boomed from those heavy speakers in the rafters.

"Action, folks! Hold your hats! Larry Gilroy, of couple No. 13, is down! He's down, folks! The floor judge is counting! There goes the count! One . . . two . . . three . . . four—" Thorndike cleared his throat excitedly, and you could hear his adenoids in the amplifiers. "Larry's partner is trying to help him back on his feet! Loretta Ward, that brave, courageous little blonde of Couple 13—look at her try to help Larry! Let's give 'em a big hand, folks!"

The count had reached nine when Larry Gilroy, with superhuman bravado and the help of his partner, finally cleared his knee from the floor and was back in the dance. Applause became thunderous, even drowning out the announcer, but it only lasted a few seconds, and then there was a scream.

The scream shrilled through the entire ballroom, caused the orchestra to miss several beats, the audience to crane necks. It shrilled again and again; Loretta Ward's mouth wide open, the muscles of her throat tense as she kept screaming and screaming.

At the same time she was trying to keep Larry on his feet, supporting him with one hand while she held the other hand aloft, staring at it.

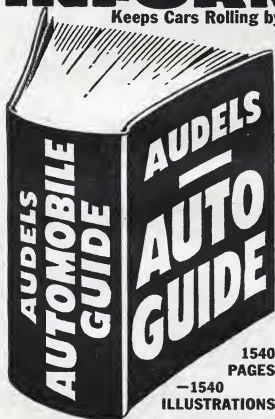
We could all see the hand she held aloft—all of us, even up in the high bleachers of the ballroom. That hand of hers was wet with blood. The back of Larry's shirt was wet with it, too.

She cried: "Larry! Larry!"

His head wagged, his lips moved, but he didn't say a word. His eyes rolled up to hers, revealing the

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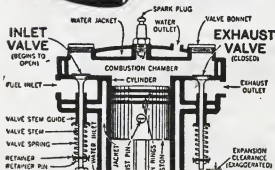
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whites of them; and then his knees became rubber and he began to slip from her grasp to the floor.

The audience, every spectator from front-row box to last row in gallery, came to their feet, yelling, shouting. The whole place turned into a madhouse—with only the master of ceremonies trying to keep order. He waved an arm frantically at the crowd. He signaled the orchestra to start playing "God Bless America." He held the portable mike close to his mouth, talking, while his voice boomed down from those speakers overhead.

"Keep your seats, folks! Larry Gilroy, of couple No. 13, just gave out! Nothing to get excited about, folks! Just a little accident—" His voice was hoarse with shouting. "Keep your seats, folks! It's all part of the show. Always a thrill a minute at the Paradise Dance Marathon! Let's all sing 'God Bless America!' All together, now—"

He was good in his line. He had what it takes. And he gave all he had. He might have succeeded in quieting down the crowd, even a big crowd like that. But he didn't.

He might as well be talking to a blizzard as it swept down rugged mountain passes. The people of the audience paid no attention to him. They surged down from the balcony; they climbed over boxes; they poured onto the dance floor, swarmed across it.

And, somewhere, a cop was blowing a whistle.

II.

We carried Larry Gilroy back to the men's rest quarters. A uniformed cop had been on duty in the ballroom when the trouble came, and he cleared the way for us and held the crowd in order.

We placed Larry on a cot in one of the rooms, calling for Doc Miller. Doc was attached to the show. He wore a white uniform, a stethoscope draped professionally about his neck. But, as a doctor, he was only one step better than a veterinarian. His position with the dance marathon was to lend color and the feeling of danger—medically and surgically supervised.

"You'd better call a doctor," said Doc Miller, worriedly. "This guy seems to be in a bad way." He bent closer over Larry Gilroy. "In fact, I think he's dead."

Personally, I didn't have to be told; anyway not by a phony in a white uniform, carrying a stethoscope he didn't know how to use. I knew Larry was dead on the dance floor, when he slumped in Loretta's arms, the back of his shirt wet with blood.

But we didn't touch Larry till the ambulance arrived, along with a police car and the squad from homicide.

It was me who'd called homicide; because I'd felt the end of a sharp instrument protruding a couple of inches from Larry's back.

The ambulance surgeons turned him over on the cot, hunting for the wound. It was high up, close to the spine. A slim rounded needle of steel that had been thrust between his ribs, going deep.

"It's an ice pick," the ambulance surgeon said, holding it aloft in rubber gloved hands. "Without a handle. This man's been stabbed."

Lieutenant Ballantyne, of the homicide squad, was in charge now. He'd been in charge from the instant the intern made that statement, and he now turned around to all of us, including Doc Miller and Phil

Thorndike. He chewed his cigar, eying us thoughtfully.

"Who is he?"

"Contestant in the show," Doc Miller said.

"A charge of mine," I added. "Just out of prison two months ago. Entered this show to make enough money to go straight. Planned to win the grand prize. A thousand dollars to the winning couple. His name is Larry Gilroy."

The lieutenant turned his eyes on me. "You here when it happened, Jack?"

"In the audience. He died during the show."

"Who stabbed him?"

"I don't know," I said. "I didn't see anybody stab him."

"You mean he died right out there on the floor with a couple of hundred people looking on?"

"Sixteen hundred and thirty-five spectators," the master of ceremonies advised accurately.

"And nobody saw him get stabbed?"

"You can canvass the audience," I told him. "The cops closed the doors. But so far nobody volunteers any information."

"This is screwy," said the lieutenant. "Sixteen hundred people watching a dance show, and one of the performers dies right out there in front of them, but nobody really sees the performer killed. Did the lights go out?"

"They were on all the time," Phil Thorndike said. "We didn't know a thing about it till the girl Larry was dancing with held up her hand and screamed. Her hand was wet with blood. She was his partner."

My voice sounded rather odd in my own ears. "A girl by the name of Loretta Ward." I was trying to make the statement seem impersonal.

"Now we're getting places," Bal-

lantyne said. "Who was his partner?"

I heard my own voice saying softly: "A girl by the name of Loretta Ward. A nice kid."

"But she was dancing with him when it happened?"

"Yes—" My voice came from far away.

And Ballantyne snapped his fingers. "Then that's the little lady I want to talk to. Right now."

The dance marathon didn't stop with the death of Larry Gilroy, who'd been stabbed, any more than it had stopped last week when a contestant died of "natural causes." Even with a police investigation under the same roof the show went on.

And there were a couple of reasons for that.

In the first place, the management didn't want to disappoint current, or future, customers. For that reason alone, the show had to go on.

And the police agreed to it because they had over sixteen hundred people under one roof, holding them for questioning, and the best way to keep them out of the hair of the investigating officers was to give them a show to look at.

That next sixty minutes saw lots of excitement in the Paradise Ballroom—more than the management ever counted on. The police had entrances and exits under guard. They took the names and addresses of all patrons, double-checked identifications. They fired questions rapidly: "Where were you when Larry Gilroy fell? Did you see anybody stab him?"

As soon as they answered questions fully, the patrons were free to leave. But none of them wished to leave. They had circus seats, at forty cents per head, to a murder

investigation, and they all preferred to stay and watch the progress of that investigation.

So the show went on, but this time with only eight couples and a single remaining in it. It went on without Loretta Ward, who'd fainted at the sight of her partner's death and who was now the primary witness for the police.

They'd taken Loretta into a back room of the ladies' rest quarters—hysterical, unable to speak. The combination of physical exhaustion from the long forty-three-day grind, and the abrupt, inexplicable murder of her dance partner—who'd died in her very arms—had been enough to put any young woman, no matter how strong, in a serious emotional state.

I paced up and down the corridor while they held Loretta in that back room. I paced from the closed doors of the quarters for men and women, down through the darkness to the dance-floor entrance, then back again. I could hear the orchestra playing fast swing music inside, and the voice of the master of ceremonies booming from the speaker system.

"A great show, folks. We've had a little unfortunate trouble here, but it's still a great show, and our contestants still carry on! Couple No. 13 is out of the contest, but we still have eight couples and a single—"

A man had been killed—murdered. It was "a little unfortunate trouble." I'd have called that understatement. But the master of ceremonies was doing a good job. He was soothing the crowd as near down to normal as could be expected under such hysterical circumstances.

Hearing that, pacing up and down the dim corridor, I kept wondering how Larry Gilroy could die in front of all those spectators, with nobody,

not even himself, an actual witness to the stabbing.

The cops, of course, had Loretta on the grill. They suspected her. And why not? She'd been dancing with him at the very moment of his death.

But, for myself, I wrote off Loretta. She was too swell a kid to be guilty of anything like that. I knew her character and her background much more intimately than Lieutenant Ballantyne. I knew she wouldn't hurt a fly; let alone stab a man she planned to marry, with an ice pick, in the back.

Wondering about it, pacing the corridor, I passed right by the big refrigerator a dozen times before I paid any attention to it. Then I stopped my pacing while it held me with a new fascination.

This refrigerator was kept in the corridor because there was no room for it any place else in the rest quarters. It held two hundred pounds of ice, which the nurses chipped off at rest periods to fill rubber ice bags that were applied to swollen feet of weary contestants. I'd seen this refrigerator a hundred times without giving it more than a glance.

But now I had a new interest in it.

I opened the heavy door, lit a match to peer inside. Heaps of ice in there, some of it broken. A couple of ice picks—that the nurses used—lying atop the ice. But one of the picks had no pick. It was only a wooden handle, the blade of it gone.

And I knew then where it had gone—into the back, between the ribs, deep into the body of Larry Gilroy.

I went swiftly along the corridor and knocked on a door. Lieutenant Ballantyne stuck his head out, saying gruffly, around his cigar: "Yeah, Jack?"

"How you getting along with Loretta?"

"Not well. She won't talk. Maybe she don't know anything, but she ought to—she was dancing with the guy."

"But maybe she didn't see any more than the rest of the spectators. You trace the murder weapon yet?" "Not yet," he said. "It's an ice pick. No handle."

"I can tell you where the handle is, lieutenant. In the refrigerator down at the end of this hall."

He looked at me owlishly, rolling the cigar in solemn lips. "Yeah?"

"It might be a good idea to test it for fingerprints," I suggested.

"You're damn right it might!"

And he pushed past me.

Loretta was on a cot in a room across the corridor from the one in which Larry Gilroy lay dead. She was small, blond as straw, and still wore the trim green skirt, the green wool sweater, which had been her costume for the contest. The number 13 was woven into her sweater, along with an advertisement for the Stevens No-Wear Shoe Co. The sweater, of course, along with her complete ensemble, had been donated to her by courtesy of Stevens No-Wear Shoes.

She lay face down with her pale cheek flat to the pillow and eyes half closed. Her body shook as if with chill, and her lips formed whimpering sounds not pleasant to hear. The night nurse and Doc Miller were wrapping her in freshly warmed blankets.

Miller said to her in a soothing voice: "Here's a friend to see you, Miss Ward."

"I won't see anybody!"

"But this is an old friend of yours. Jack McGregor."

That made her open her eyes and look up at me like a hurt child. "Hello, Jack." The way she said

DS—10E

Teela

against the world...

That was the way it looked. About to lose her ranch, her name a cause for gossip, her cattle being rustled—there seemed no way out.

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it made me feel I might be her last friend in the world.

The night nurse gave a nod to Miller, the two of them leaving the room, closing the door behind them with a soft click, and leaving me alone with Loretta for the first time in ten years.

I felt awkward again, like that time way back at the high-school dance. I drew a chair close to the cot, straddled it, and tried to be the friend she needed.

I asked: "Anything I can do, Loretta?"

Her blond head moved just a trifle against the pillow. "Nothing, Jack. He's dead, and I don't want to talk about it. These police keep yelling questions at me."

"They only want to find out about Larry. You should help them. They have to know."

She grimaced and hid her face in the pillow.

"Do you understand the circumstances, Loretta?"

"Yes—" That came, almost smothered, from under the pillow. "He was killed. That's what they tell me. But I don't know anything about it. He just seemed kind of . . . tired. Then I looked at my hands. Blood on them. Larry's. From his back. Then his body went limp in my arms. That's absolutely all I know."

I thought carefully before I made the next statement. I tried not to word it bluntly. "They think you might know *more* about it, Loretta. Lieutenant Ballantyne thinks—well, that you might've had something to do with it."

"I don't care what they think."

"But they might arrest you."

"I don't care."

"You were in love with Larry?"

I asked.

"I was going to marry him. Yes."

An idea crossed my mind. She hadn't been in love with him at all. Girls like Loretta—kind, big-hearted, with an inborn desire to mother the wayward. It occurred to me she'd only planned to marry Larry in order to reform him.

Maybe I felt a little better after that. Felt a little more cheerful, though there was still nothing in the general set-up to feel cheerful about.

"The least you can do for him now," I said, "is help us find out who did it to him. You can tell us things."

She looked up then, from the pillow, cheeks streaked with tears, marked by mascara from her lashes. "What is it you want to know?"

"Everything, anything. You must have some ideas. Larry had enemies, or one enemy. He must've said something."

"Not a thing, Jack. He never said—" Then her eyes brightened with a new thought. "Why, yes! He did say something. About the holdup. Did you know there was a holdup at the box office last night?"

I did know it. In fact, I'd been in the ballroom at the very time it happened.

It was just before midnight. Doc Miller, in the late hours, always removed his white medical coat, the stethoscope, and doubled in brass as ticket seller, relieving Joe Fanta, who worked in the box office during an earlier shift.

I remembered very well how it happened—the contestants on the dance floor going through rumba sprints while the orchestra played wildly, the master of ceremonies shouted encouragement from the platform, and the crowd stamped and applauded for somebody to fall of exhaustion.

While it was going like that, we heard a pistol shot from the outer

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foyer, and then all the lights in the place went out. In the sudden darkness, women of the audience shrieked in fear. But Phil Thorndike, up on the platform, kept yelling through his loud-speakers: "Keep your seats, folks! Nothing to get worried about! Just a little trouble with the electricity, no doubt. Everything fixed in a moment. In the meantime, we'll all sing! The orchestra will render 'God Bless America!' Come on, boys! Let there be music!"

So the orchestra played to quiet the nerves of the audience, like "God Save the King" on a sinking British ship, and Thorndike kept yelling encouragement until the lights came on again.

It took only minutes, maybe three or four minutes, and the entire audience looked sheepish in the new light—sheepish because they'd been worried over the dark.

But something had happened during that period of darkness. Doc Miller, as was his custom at midnight, had locked the box office in the outer foyer in order to take the night's cash profits back to the safe in the manager's office.

The way doc told it to the cops, "somebody fired a shot, and slugged him over the head as he was locking the cage. He caught sight of two tough guys who looked like gangsters, but he didn't see enough of them to be able to describe them very well. They hit him again, over the head, snatched the box of money from him, and pulled the master switch on the house lights. Then they kicked him in the jaw so hard he passed out.

He now had cuts and bruises to show for the robbery, and the guys who'd slugged and kicked him had departed for places unknown, in the darkness, taking away with them

about twelve hundred dollars in currency, and two hundred in change from the cash drawers in the ticket cage.

Remembering all that, I said to Loretta: "What about the holdup last night? What about it?"

"Well, Larry mentioned it to me this morning, while we were dancing and having breakfast served on the floor by the nurses. He whispered to me that he knew something about it."

"You think he—"

I didn't know quite how to finish framing the question, but she understood the rest of it without my continuing.

"Larry had a part in it? That's silly, Jack. How could he have any part in it? He stayed in my arms, dancing, all the time while the lights were out. We bumped into other couples dancing in the dark. We all stuck to the show, waiting for the lights to come back on. So Larry had no chance to do anything. Not any more than the master of ceremonies, or the orchestra boys. We all kept working, even in the dark. None of us stopped for a second. So we can't say Larry—"

"No," I agreed, "I guess he didn't. But what did he have to say about it? I mean, this morning."

"Well, he just said he had an idea about it; that he got the idea when he tripped in the dark last night. I told him he ought to speak to the police, but he said they'd probably only take him out of the contest to question him. He said the best thing to do was keep his mouth shut and stick till the finish. He said to me: 'We're gonna win that prize at the finish, honey. Now we're a cinch to win it. Don't worry, we'll win!' He seemed to be very determined that we'd win."

"But somebody stopped him," I said.

She sat up on the cot, the warm blanket wrapped close about her. She hugged it close and shivered. "Jack, you don't think . . . you don't really think that I . . . that I'd do anything like that to Larry?"

"No," I assured her, "I certainly don't."

"But how could anybody get close enough to stab him? While he was dancing in my arms? I'd see them."

"That's what the police think," I told her. "But I've got another idea on the subject. I don't think Larry was stabbed while dancing with you. I think he was stabbed during the rest period."

"That's silly, Jack. If he'd been stabbed before, then how would he be able to get back out on the dance floor?"

"It's not so silly," I said. "*He didn't know he was stabbed.*"

III.

My mind had gone back to a couple of recent police cases, one in San Francisco, one in Kansas City. In the West Coast case, two women of eighty had a love quarrel over a man of ninety. One of the old gals, during the hair-pulling, was stabbed with an old-fashioned hat pin, stabbed deep through the ribs with it. But she didn't feel pain, didn't even know she'd been stabbed until several hours later, when dying of internal hemorrhage.

In the Kansas City case, a sex fiend prowled the streets during the night, attacking young girls. The night the police got him he'd been struggling with a girl in a dark alley. Her screams brought a patrolman: She didn't seem to be hurt, refused to be taken to the emergency hospital. She stood up to go home;

then abruptly dropped dead, and police surgeons found a darning needle buried deep in her back.

Thinking of that now, leaving Loretta Ward on the cot in the back room of the dancers' rest quarters, I stepped out into the corridor that led to the main floor of the ballroom.

Half a dozen uniformed cops and city detectives, stood around the refrigerator with flashlights while one of them, with a satchel, dusted powder again and again over the pickless handle of the ice pick.

"No soap," he said at last. "Clean as a whistle."

"That proves it," said Lieutenant Ballantyne. "These picks are used all the time by the nurses. To fill ice bags. Fingerprints on all the rest—except this one handle. Reason for that is the killer wiped it clean. This is the handle from the pick that did the trick."

"You got something?" I intruded.

"Plenty. That Larry Gilroy wasn't necessarily stabbed out there on the dance floor. Maybe back here in the corridor. Somebody slapped him on the back with a hand that had a pick in it. The handle was loose. It came away. Gilroy didn't even know he'd been stabbed. It could happen."

"I was just thinking the same thing," I said.

"The other angle," the lieutenant went on, "is that it has to be somebody connected with the show. Somebody who could walk into the dark corridor and give Gilroy a friendly slap on the back. They tell me none of the audience is ever allowed back here. So it had to be somebody in the show."

"Do you have anybody in particular in mind?"

"You're damned right I do! A guy and a motive. He's one of the

contestants. Fella named Ben West."

I knew what he had in mind regarding Ben West, because I'd thought of it myself. West, the single, had till midnight tonight to pick up a girl partner from the contest. So unless some male dropped out, his physical suffering through forty-three days would be a failure.

Forty-three days of marathon grind, the only rest coming in brief ten-minute sleep periods from each hour, taking your meals while dancing, the blare of the music night and day, the sprint dances intended to throw a heavier burden on the contestants, the shouts and cries of the mob—all that, forty-three torturous days of it, was enough to turn even a normal mind to desperation. Sleeplessness, exhaustion, muscles stiffened, legs swollen. And the mind itself would be affected.

So it was not beyond reason that Ben West, with only the lack of a partner standing between himself and the goal of triumph—that thousand-dollar prize—would seek even a means of violence to win his victory.

Lieutenant Ballantyne thought so, and at eleven o'clock that night he ordered Ben West out of the contest, for questioning.

West staggered wearily into the corridor, smelling of sweat, his eyes bright as glass.

"Lemme alone," he begged, in the cracked emotional voice of fatigue. "I still got an hour to pick out somebody."

Ballantyne threw at him the challenge: "Pick out somebody? I think you already picked somebody out. Larry Gilroy. You picked out his girl for a dance partner, and then you *picked* Larry out of the dance."

Ben West stood back dazed, as the lieutenant stabbed him with a blunt forefinger and booted into him with

accusing eyes. "It was a cute trick, Ben. In a dark corridor. With an ice pick from the refrigerator. But it didn't work, see? We're next to you, Ben. You want to confess right now? Or do you want no sleep down at headquarters—no sleep night and day—no sleep till you talk. We've cracked tougher guys than you, Ben."

"You mean you think that . . . that I—"

Ballantyne waved a hand to one of the uniformed cops. "Let's run him downtown, Jim. He's tired, but he wants to stay awake for another couple of weeks."

I didn't remain in the corridor to listen to any more of it. Ballantyne was bluffing, for bluff's sake, the way a hard cop usually does. I felt sure he had no more information on Ben West than his suspicion that Ben was a possibility.

I'd thought of the same possibility myself, but now, after talking to Loretta, I saw before me a much stronger possibility. And with that in mind I left the corridor, passed around the black drapes of the orchestra platform, behind the high staggered tiers of seats, behind the noisy spectators, around to the main entrance of the ballroom.

Here there was an inner foyer where you could buy hot dogs, cokes, coffee. Beyond this, through swing doors always standing open to let in fresh air, was a small ticket booth like you see outside a movie theater.

I stood behind this for a moment, then looked back through the open doors. I could see straight across the inner foyer, where a uniformed cop stood on duty, past the hot-dog stand, to the dance floor and the orchestra stage. The orchestra was playing "I can't Give You Anything but Love, Baby," while the remain-

ing eight couples danced wearily in the square arena and the crowd hooted and yelled.

I saw the uniformed cop order a hot dog, wait for it to sizzle on the griddle; then, munching it, stroll over close to the roped arena to watch the dancers.

There was little sign now that a murder had taken place in this ballroom. As the hour approached midnight there was just the usual drifting in of new customers, buying tickets at the box office, passing inside.

Out on the curb there was a police car with no cops in it, a press car with no reporters in it. And no activity on the street except the gentle fall of spring rain, a newsboy hawking a late edition at the next corner. The city, as yet, hadn't learned of the events at the Paradise Ballroom.

I rapped on the glass door of the little ticket booth and Doc Miller unlocked it for me.

"Hello, Jack," he said. "How's it going inside?"

"About the same."

"The cops didn't nail anybody yet, huh?"

"They've dropped the beef against Loretta Ward. Temporarily. Trying Ben West now."

"Ben?" He snapped his fingers. "Never thought of him. But if Ben got rid of Larry, then he could have Loretta for a partner. That it?"

"It's what they think," I said. "But they're wrong. Tell me what happened, doc, when those two guys held you up last night."

"Last night?" He gave me a puzzled, owlish look. "Last night don't have much importance—compared to what happened tonight."

"It does to me," I corrected.

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"These two guys that held you up—what did they look like?"

"Well—" He fished a cigarette from a crumpled pack in his pocket and lit it. "I didn't get a good look. It happened so fast."

"Tell me," I said.

"Well, I was just standing in here, selling tickets. Then along about midnight, like always on Saturday night, I got the heavy currency in bundles and put it in a cardboard box, along with a bunch of the silver I wouldn't need for change. Like always, on Saturday night, I lock up the cage and take the box back to the manager's office. There's a safe back there. No use leaving all that stuff out here in the cage.

"So what happened?"

"Well, like I told the cops after the robbery."

"What?"

"Just that I open this door with the box under my arm, and a couple of guys jump me. Couple of big husky guys, like gorillas. One of them has a gun and shoots it into the floor." He pointed a toe to splinters in the pine planks at his feet. "You can see where the bullet hit. Right there. The other guy grabs the box from me, and starts slugging with a short piece of lead pipe. The guy with the gun reached into the booth here and pulled the wires in the fuse box. That cut off all the lights. Not just here in the foyer; in the ballroom, too. All the wires come in here, because this is where the electric meter is."

"Then what?" I asked.

"You know the rest. They slugged me, kicked me, even when I was down on the floor in the dark. They even kicked me in the jaw and the back of the neck. Look"—he bent down, twisted away from me, showing me the bruises, the bandaged cuts.

"So that's how it happened, Jack. Finally, the janitor came out here with a flashlight, threw the main switch while he got the wires back on, then connected the lights in the ballroom. In the meantime, those two guys got away. I couldn't do a damn thing. Hell, they caught me by surprise."

"Yes?" I said doubtfully.

"All morning the cops had me downtown looking at pictures in the mug-book. But I couldn't pick out those guys. You understand what I mean?"

"I understand why you couldn't find them in the police mug-book," I said.

"Sure. Even if they'd been arrested before, and their pictures were in the book, I wouldn't be able to tell."

"Of course not," I agreed, but I agreed with him in a deep kind of sarcasm. "They weren't in the police book, doc. They're probably not in any police book—not anywhere in the country. In fact, they probably don't exist at all."

The newsboy had come strolling up from the corner, through the thin fall of rain, and a wave to him brought him hurrying up the foyer to me. "Paper, mister?"

I shook my head. "How'd you like to make a dollar?"

The newsboy frowned skeptically. "Doing what?"

"Just delivering a message inside the ballroom. Won't take you but a couple of minutes. Is it a deal?"

"A closed deal," the kid said. "What's the message? Who to?"

I pointed across the empty inner foyer, across the dance floor to the distant orchestra platform where the boys played fast, gay music and Phil Thorndike talked enthusiasm through the speaker system.

I said: "That man at the microphone is the master of ceremonies. Tell him to step out here; I want to see him. It's a matter of life and death. Mostly death. In fact, it's about the death of a fellow named Gilroy."

Doc Miller stared at me with wide, puzzled eyes and a mouth that couldn't quite close, not even to drag on his smoke. He flipped the butt away, nervously lit another, saying: "What's eating you, Jack? This is no time to bother Phil; he's gotta keep the show going."

"That's the point," I continued to the newsboy. "When you deliver the message be sure to tell the master of ceremonies we don't want this private little interview to interrupt his announcements. Tell him to bring the microphone with him."

The newsboy didn't get it. "You mean he should disconnect the mike?"

"Definitely not," I said. "That mike's on a long cable that rolls off a drum-wheel on the platform. So when he brings the mike with him, the cable will pull along, and he can keep talking to his audience. Tell him that. Tell him exactly what I told you. Deliver the message in full. You got it?"

"Sure, I got it. Who shall I tell him is sending the message?"

"No name," I said. "Just tell him it's somebody who's stretched his imagination, and now wants to see a cable stretched. Can you remember that?"

"Sure."

"Then go to it, kid. You're ripe for a dollar."

When the newsboy left on his errand, Doc Miller's nervousness increased to such an extent that I didn't like to take my eyes off him. He threw away the new cigarette after only a few puffs, and his hands

trembled when he tried to light another.

He said tensely: "I don't get this, Jack."

"Just try to relax," I suggested, and shot a quick glance into the ballroom.

I saw the newsboy skirt the roped-off dance floor, saw him come up to the side of the orchestra platform and wave a hand.

Phil Thorndike went over to the edge of the stage, bent down to hear what the kid had to say. At the same time he pressed the microphone against his chest, to silence it.

I turned my eyes back to Doc Miller. His face was pale now; no color at all to it. His cheeks went as white as his phony doctor's coat.

He said lamely: "You're sure acting bugs, Jack."

I didn't answer that. The news-

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boy had returned, got his dollar from me, assured me the message had been accurately delivered. Then he was off down the street, striding fast through the rain, hawking his edition.

Inside the ballroom Phil Thorndike's voice barked through the speakers: "—and now, ladies and gentlemen, I will turn this mike over to our band leader, Slim Walters, who will announce the next dance in this marvelous, colossal, spectacular show, at the famous Paradise Ballroom. Talk to 'em, Slim. Let there be music!"

The voice of the band leader spoke cordially, announcing a number. The band began to play: "There I Go . . . Leading With My Heart Again" while the audience applauded heavily.

Then Phil Thorndike came rapidly through the inner foyer, and out to us. His face was even a shade paler than Doc Miller's. He eyed us both worriedly; then attempted to dismiss his worry with a casual grin.

"Hi, Jack. Hi, doc. What goes on?"

Doc Miller said nothing, just stared solemnly at his shoes.

I asked: "You get my message, Phil?"

"That your message?"

"It was. Why didn't you bring the mike with you?"

"I don't get it," Phil said.

"Wouldn't the cable stretch this far tonight, Phil? Maybe it's not as elastic on Sundays, as on Saturdays."

There was a second in which nothing at all happened, in which no remark was made, in which the very silence was like the tightness of a drawn bow—an instant before the arrow is sped on its way. From the corner of my eye I saw Doc Miller lift solemn eyes upward from his own shoes, saw the glance of decision

he gave briefly to Phil Thorndike. Then Miller snaked a hand to his hip pocket, snatched out a leather-covered sap, and whipped it at me with the force of an Indian cleaving a skull with a tomahawk.

I ducked under the swish of it, and only lost my hat in the ducking. I slugged Miller with a haymaker that knocked him hard against the booth of the ticket office, then wheeled to face Phil Thorndike, but Phil had already gotten into action. He'd yanked a flat automatic pistol from under his coat and now he jabbed it against my side.

"Easy!" he barked, casting a swift glance over his shoulder to make sure nobody saw us. Then to me: "Stay still, Jack; otherwise, you get it in the ribs."

I stayed still, feeling like a sucker, but I said: "Maybe I won't feel it. Maybe it'll go in easy, like an ice pick."

"The smart stuff won't buy you any chips," he said, and nodded to Doc Miller. "Come on, doc. We're walking around the corner."

Again Miller had the leather-covered sap in his hand, holding it close to his side. His right ear was red and ringing where I'd slugged him.

"Walk," Phil Thorndike said to me, edging me onward, the gun now a lump in his pocket, his hand on it. "We'll take a little walk, Jack."

IV.

We walked out into the fresh rain, the cool night, and there was nobody else on the street. We walked down to a deserted corner—even the newsboy wasn't there—passed a corner drugstore, and around to an auto park where Phil Thorndike kept his car. The park had lots of cars in it, empty, and no attendant. We walked back, where it was very dark

now, with the rain falling, and we came to an old green Buick sedan, the car that belonged to Phil.

He opened the rear door and said: "Get in, Jack."

I got in. He climbed in beside me and handed the keys to Doc Miller. "You drive, doc."

"Where?"

"A long ways. The farther the better." Then he put stony eyes on me in the dark of the sedan. "Who else has the same ideas, Jack?"

"Wouldn't you like to know?" I said, bluffing. "This gangster stuff, taking me for a ride, won't gain you a thing, Phil. It's out of your class."

"You want some money, Jack?"

I didn't answer.

"How about a grand? Cash. Right now."

"Don't be generous," I said. "The

haul last night was fourteen hundred. If you have to pay a grand hush money out of it, that only leaves two hundred apiece for you and doc. It's small pay for a couple of guys that pulled a fast one."

Thorndike still had the muzzle of the gun pressed hard against my ribs, through the cloth of his pocket. In the dark we sat there, Phil beside me with the gun, Doc Miller up front under the wheel; in a dark sedan at the back of a graveled parking lot, with rain pattering lightly on the roof.

Phil said: "What gave you the idea we pulled a fast one?"

"A lady named Loretta," I said. "But she didn't know the real facts of it herself. She gave me the hint without knowing it."

"What hint?"

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"One she got from Larry this morning. While they were dancing through breakfast, he told her he had an angle on the box-office stick-up last night. He got the idea, he told her, when he tripped on something in the dark, during the time the lights had been out. He also told her he'd keep the idea to himself and that Couple No. 13 was a cinch to win the contest. Loretta didn't make any sense out of that. I did."

Thorndike's eyes became black pools of bitterness, his lips compressed in a tight line. "What sense, Jack?"

"You ought to know. Listen, the police already have the idea the murder of Larry was an inside job. And when Loretta gets around to telling them what Larry said to her this morning, they'll realize last night's holdup was also an inside job. One led to the other."

"You and doc got your brains together and decided to pull a fast one. The way it worked, doc just waited for a time when the inner and outer foyers were empty—to make sure there'd be no witnesses. Then he unlocked the cage, with the money under his arm—fourteen hundred bucks—and he fired a shot into the floor, and pulled all the lights in the ballroom."

"The firing of the shot was a smart move. It would freeze the audience in their seats. Nobody'd come prowling through the darkness to investigate that shot, unless it was a cop, and I guess you had the cop's beat timed so he wouldn't be around there."

"So doc stands out at the ticket cage, waiting for you. And you come to him fast. You cross the dark dance floor, carrying your mike with you. I know how those mike's work. It's like talking into a silenced office telephone. No sound

comes at the mike itself, and your voice still booms from the loudspeakers. That was your alibi. It made everybody think you were still up on the orchestra platform."

"Instead of that, you came out through the dark empty foyers and you took the money and the gun from doc. It's probably the gun you've got in your pocket right now. Then you slugged doc several times, to bruise him up, to make it look like an outside job. You probably used the same blackjack doc now has in his pocket."

"The whole job took only a few minutes; in total darkness. You retreated back through the foyer to ditch the money and the gun, letting the microphone cable reel in on its drum. The reason it's rigged up like that is so you can leave the platform to get down among the contestants during the show. But last night you used it for a little secret show of your own. Maybe you added extra cable to it for last night's special performance."

Neither Phil nor doc said a word now as we sat there in the car, in the rain. Doc had the key in the switch, but he hadn't yet started the motor. His head was turned, staring back at me, his eyes as narrowly bitter as Thorndike's.

"The thing that went sour," I continued, "was that Couple No. 13, Larry and Loretta, got tangled up with your cable; Larry tripped on it, and got wise."

"You'd no doubt figured the possibility that somebody might tangle with it, one of the contestants, but you didn't think they'd ever figure how far you went with it, and you could always explain that you'd just jumped down on the dance floor to keep the contestants in order."

"But you couldn't explain that to Larry; he was too smart for you. He

figured out how it worked, and when he got you alone, at one of the rest periods, he told you he was next to you. He said the only thing that would keep his mouth shut was winning the contest. You'd have to frame it with the judges to give the other boys and girls a fast count whenever they slipped, or dropped—a slow count for Larry and Loretta. Maybe other contestants would be ruled out on technicalities. But the price you had to pay was that Couple No. 13 had to win the show."

"The dirty—" he began.

I cut in: "At first you figured you'd have to play ball with Larry. There was a good chance he'd keep the secret from Loretta; she was marrying him to reform him, and he wouldn't be able to disillusion her by saying he was pulling a blackmail to win the show. But even at that you figured you shouldn't put so much trust in an ex-crook, ex-bad boy, ex-convict, like Larry Gilroy. Larry had the goods on you. He probably investigated that wheel-drum and found out you added some cable to it for your little job. He had too much on you. So you decided to put him out of the contest—permanently."

Phil said to me now, from clamped lips: "You got it all figured out, huh, smart guy?"

"All," I admitted glibly. "You knew if you made a shrewd kill on Larry, with no suspicion touching you, the police would never be able to figure it out. A guy with a past like Larry's could have anybody in the world want to rub him."

"So with the same brain that figured out the microphone alibi for the fake stick-up, you figured out the ice-pick finish for Larry."

"One of the picks in the refrigerator had a loose handle. Just the thing. The corridor was dark: just

the place. There was no element of timing, since you could wait your chance. As master of ceremonies you had a right to be in the rest rooms, or the corridor, at any time you wanted—in an official capacity. So you made it a point to be there at every sleep period this evening, just waiting the chance when Larry might be the last one out and you could meet him alone. It worked."

Phil gave a bitter laugh. "Yeah, it worked."

"A slap on the back," I said, "with the ice pick. Fast. Then yanking the handle away in the dark. Larry wouldn't stand a chance in a million of knowing he'd been stabbed. After forty-three days of marathon grind, Larry's whole body was affected; muscles swollen, painful, his insides practically numb. On top of that he'd just been shaken out of the deep sleep of fatigue. In a condition like that he could probably take a dozen ice picks in the back and not know it."

"So that's the way you worked it. You just chatted with Larry in the corridor, wishing him luck, telling him you were fixing it with the floor judges to let him win. You sent him back into the show, dying on his feet, and he didn't know it."

"Then all you had to do was wipe off the handle of the pick and replace it in the refrigerator. Just return to the orchestra platform and be gay again—till Larry dropped."

For a long tight moment Phil Thorndike gave me the solemn, cold eye of an executioner about to spring the final trap. Then he said: "What the hell do you expect to gain by giving me all this?"

"My life," I said. "And the jackpot."

"How come?"

"Don't be a dope, Phil. I got all this just from a few words Loretta mentioned to me. Lieutenant Bal-

lantyne is a hard-headed, hard-hatted cop, like you see in the comic strips, but underneath it he's got thirty years of experience. Thirty years of cracking tougher cases than this one. You're behind the eight ball, Phil. Right now. Turn State's evidence and maybe you dodge the death sentence. It's your only chance."

He thought that over, a tense shudder moving him against me, the gun in his pocket still pressed tight at my side. Doc Miller said: "I think the guy's right, Phil," but Thorndike gave him a snort of scorn.

"For you, maybe. With me, it's different; you didn't shove Larry, doc. Get this car rolling."

"You mean you're gonna—"

"Get it rolling."

I ask you: Was I in a spot? Once we got rolling, there'd be no chance for me; none at all.

If I'd had one man to handle—that might have been maneuvered somehow; I didn't quite know how, but it would be a reasonable, fifty-fifty chance. But with two men, and one of them with a loaded gun all ready to blast me—

Phil Thorndyke was desperate. He just had to get out of this. My life didn't mean a thing to him. But it meant something to me. It meant, as a matter of fact, a terrific lot to me. I thought of Loretta Ward; even in that spot I thought of her. I had a picture of her face before me. Her face, as I'd last seen her, and as I'd first seen her. I thought of those times when I'd carried her books.

Doc started the car, the blackjack on the front seat beside him, while he kept one hand on the wheel and one pulling out the choke to warm the cold motor. And that was my

one chance—maybe my last one.

Phil Thorndike was sitting at my left. I hooked my left arm, jabbed my elbow into his throat with all the force I could muster. He gave a choking gasp, and his head snapped back, and his cough nearly gagged him.

The pistol banged twice in his pocket, but I wasn't there in the way of it. I'd thrown myself across his lap, slugging, hammering—elbows and fists, working at his throat and jaw, storming him in a *blitzkrieg* attack that forced him to cover on the defensive while he tried to yank the gun from his pocket.

It snagged; he tugged; he couldn't free it.

I clamped my right hand on his wrist, holding it inactive against the gun; then, falling to my knees on the tonneau floor, dragging him with me, I crooked my left arm over the back of the seat, got a strangle hold on Doc Miller.

I had them both then, one in front, one in back, while all of us fought crazily, struggling, in a sedan in a rainy parking lot. I threw all my weight forward over the seat, pushing Doc Miller's head against the horn button on the steering post.

The horn blasted continuously, and I added to the noise of it by shouting for Ballantyne, or any cop inside the Paradise Ballroom.

Phil Thorndike got his hands free and clawed at my eyes. That made me let go of doc.

He yelled: "Get 'im, doc!"

But Miller opened the door of the car, and stumbled out, and started to run across the dark auto park toward the street. At the same moment I heard a whistle blow, and a uniformed cop, from the rear exit of

the ballroom, shouted: "What goes on? Stop!"

'Doc didn't stop, and there was a single shot. Then he stopped, dropping into the gravel, holding both hands to his stomach.

I saw that out of the corner of my eye, from the sedan, while I elbowed the latch and swung the door open. With the opening door, I pulled Phil Thorndike out into the rain with me.

We both fell into the gravel, and he was still trying to get the gun from his pocket when the cop came running up and got him by the collar. A thick, heavy knee, in blue uniform trousers, hit Phil in the face so hard I could hear his teeth clatter.

"He's got a gun!" I warned.

But the cop didn't need the warning. His service revolver had become a club; and before Phil Thorndike could scramble up from the gravel, he was dropped in his tracks—the way they clout steers in a slaughter house.

It was all over before dawn that morning, and when Ballantyne released Loretta Ward I told her I'd walk home with her.

It was like the old times, way back in the past, when I used to carry her books from school. Now, though, we were adults, and walking in the rain through the early morning. Her mind was miles away—maybe on Larry. I'd fixed everything up, but I hadn't brought Larry back. And I wondered, in the silence between us, if she really wanted him back.

I said at last: "Would you like a cup of coffee, Loretta?"

"All right, Jack."

"Where shall we go?"

She looked up at me briefly. "I don't care, Jack. I'll go anywhere—as long as it's not dancing."

THE END.

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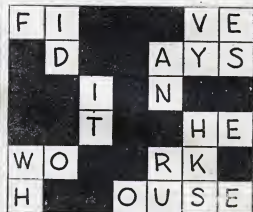
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- D. CAPsize
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